



Estonian *Life* Stories

Edited and translated by

Tiina Kirss

Compiled by

Rutt Hinrikus

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Central European University Press
Budapest New York

English translation ©2009 by Tiina Kirss

Published in 2009 by

CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY PRESS

An imprint of the

Central European University Share Company

Nádor utca 11, H-1051 Budapest, Hungary

Tel: +36-1-327-3138 or 327-3000

Fax: +36-1-327-3183

E-mail: ceupress@ceu.hu

Website: www.ceupress.com

400 West 59th Street, New York NY 10019, USA

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ISBN 978-963-9776-39-5 cloth

Financial support for publication is gratefully acknowledged from the Traducta Foundation of the Estonian Cultural Endowment and the Ministry of Education of the Estonian Government (Program „Estonian Language and Cultural Memory“)

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Eesti rahva elulood. English

Estonian life stories / compiled by Rutt Hinrikus ; edited and translated by Tiina Kirss.
p. cm.

ISBN 978-9639776395 (cloth)

1. Estonia—History—20th century—Biography. 2. Estonia—Biography. I. Hinrikus, R. (Rutt) II. Kirss, Tiina, 1957–III. Title.

DK503.745.E3413 2009

947.98'0840922—dc22

[B]

2009017738

Printed in Hungary by
Akadémiai Nyomda, Martonvásár

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PREFACE

On the Collection of Estonian Life Stories

More than 30 years have passed since, after graduating from university, I was hired at the Estonian Literary Museum and got my first taste of collecting manuscript sources—the personal archives, correspondence, manuscripts, and memoirs of distinguished Estonian cultural figures. Paradoxically, the institution which in Estonia bears the name “Literary Museum” is really not a museum, but rather an association of three archives of Estonian oral and written culture—a folklore archive, a cultural history archive, and an archival library. The Estonian Literary Museum, which has grown to become the central institution collecting life stories in Estonia, has developed alongside the Estonian National Museum, founded in 1909. The two institutions were run by the same organization until 1940, at which time they became independent. Throughout the Soviet occupation, it was safer for a memory institution to bear the name “museum” rather than “archive,” since archives were closed (or at least half-closed) institutions, where access and use of materials was subject to closer surveillance. Furthermore people never completely trusted any Soviet institutions. During the Soviet era, efforts to collect memoirs—if they were at all successful—yielded texts with the “proper” ideological slant. Conversely, the regime did not trust the people, and archives were closed even to those who wished to research family trees.

Estonia is certainly not the only place in the world where memories have been feared, avoided, or distorted. Fortunately destruction and forgetting do not always rule in history; alongside these forces there has always been remembering—the preservation and collection of “memory-objects.” During the rising tide of Estonian nationalism in the second half of the 19th century, the term “old treasures” (*vanavarad*) was adopted, to refer to things of ethnographic value to keep in museums, but also to oral tradition. The first nationwide campaign to collect oral

folklore (*rahvapärinus*) was initiated in 1888 by pastor Jakob Hurt, leader of the conservative wing of the movement of national awakening, with his call in the newspapers, “Appeals to Estonia’s Awakened Sons and Daughters” (“Paar palvid Eesti ärksamaile poegadele ja tütardele”). The people were urged to write down and collect old songs and stories. Over 1,400 people participated in the campaign, sending Hurt mainly old folksongs, which it was high time to gather, since they were fast disappearing.

In the 1930s, unpublished memoirs began to be collected by the Cultural History Archive of the joint museums. A tradition of gathering and publishing autobiographical materials made a modest beginning and even had a brief season of flourishing. Soon the clock was striking the last hours of the Estonian Republic.

After 1940 and during the 50 years of Soviet occupation that followed, the collection and preservation of narratives of both collective and private experience was fraught with danger, except for the “old treasures”—ethnography or folklore, and by extension, cultural history. Memoirs were published by actors, composers, and cultural figures, but seldom by scholars, and none by politicians, except for propagandistic texts. Published memoirs that sought to avoid willful falsification required compromise—tactical omissions, and abbreviated chronologies, such as ending with the ideologically palatable events of 1905. How many people wrote their memoirs surreptitiously during this period, consigning them “into the drawer,” is of course an interesting question. A portion of these previously written “hidden” memoirs have by now reached publication.

After the year 1988, remembering in Estonia was not quite so dangerous any more: life stories that told more of the whole story began to be published. The Estonian Heritage Society sponsored a heritage collection campaign spanning the years 1988–92, which drew a great many participants. To date the Estonian Heritage Society’s collection, held at the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu, consists of approximately 2,000 manuscripts. As the leader of this campaign, Mart Laar, pointed out in 1989, a portion of historical memory was being restored—those chapters of national and personal pasts that up until then could not be discussed openly and publicly. Another leader in the field of life story collection, theatre director Merle Karusoo, who renowned for her documentary productions based on life stories, explained her work with the imperative that the collected stories must be given back to the people.

The increasing openness of society created optimal conditions for the collection of life stories. The Cultural History Archive of the Estonian Literary Museum published its first call for the collection of Estonian life stories in newspapers in the fall of 1989. During the following year more than one hundred life stories were submitted. Though taboos were lifted and the general fear of repercussions subsided, in 1997 the question was still being asked: what will happen if I give my memoirs to the museum and after that the Russians come back?

A significant portion of the material from the Literary Museum's life stories collection has been elicited by means of life story competitions. The first call, "My destiny and the destiny of those close to me in the labyrinths of history" yielded 265 life stories (about 20,000 pages), with manuscripts ranging in length from a few to a few hundred pages. Most were memoirs that focused on dramatic historical events. The 1999 competition, "One Hundred Lives of a Century" set as its goal the collection of material for the anthology "Estonian Life Stories." The most outstanding of the 230 life stories collected were chosen for publication in the anthology.

In the following years, more competitions were organized, on topics such as life in the Estonian SSR, the German occupation, and the influences of war on the writer and his/her family. One of them, "My life and the Patarei prison" focused on the historic Tallinn prison where many wartime and Soviet-era political prisoners and victims of repression were held. A special campaign was a contest for schoolchildren organized by Lennart Meri, President of the Estonian Republic, in 2001, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the June 1941 deportations. The students were to find a survivor of deportation among their relatives or neighbours, and write down that person's reminiscences. A selection of the best 1,500 projects—lengthy biographies, biographical research, and short answers to interview questions, is now a separate collection at the Estonian Literary Museum.

It is sometimes asked why memoirs are collected through competitions. Potential authors are motivated by a firm deadline for completion of manuscripts, the incentive of small awards, and chance to meet other writers on Life Story Days, as well as by the possibility that their memoirs will be published someday.

The life story authors span several generations and occupations. While in the older generation there is a balance of men and women, starting with the generation of born in the 1940s, 70% of the writers

are women. There is a slight slant in favour of rural writers. Memoirs written from the point of view of survivors and victims are plentiful, but there are almost none from perpetrators or those repentant of being led astray by official propaganda. Deportees and one-time political refugees, whose home is far from Estonia, and those who kept life going in Estonia due to their everyday work are the majority of the writers: leaders and lead-workers are few and far between.

The goal of the life story competition “One Hundred Lives of the Century” was to put together a composite “Estonian life story,” a mosaic portrait composed of one hundred life stories. The jury was headed by one of Estonia’s most recognized writers, Jaan Kross, and the editorial board for the anthology included most of Estonia’s life story collection “fanatics.” At that time there were not too many of these, while today we can find active collectors in almost every corner of Estonia.

The task of selecting and editing the life stories fell mainly to me: I had been present throughout the process of collection, and had a connection with each one of them. Before beginning to choose texts from among more than 300 submissions, as well as from those collected earlier, some framing selection criteria had to be set: first, to choose people with very different life trajectories, to include a diversity of social backgrounds, ages, and sectors of life. We also wanted to choose the best-written texts, the most vivid and striking tales, though we placed the priority on content (diversity of life experience) over form. It was decided to include more older authors, born in the first half of the century, and fewer younger ones.

Eesti rahva elulood (“Estonian Life Stories”) was published at the end of the year 2000, not as the 1000-page volume we initially envisioned, but in two volumes of 50 life stories and 500 pages each. A third volume was added in 2002. The twenty-five stories translated for this collection were chosen from the total of 150 encompassed by the three-volume work “Estonian Life Stories,” reflecting the disproportion in the original by highlighting the 1920s generation, whom World War II hit the hardest. The men were subject, sooner or later, to mobilization by one or the other of the occupying powers, or chose to avoid it by fleeing to the woods or across the Gulf to Finland. Until the fall of 1944, there was still hope that the Estonian Republic would be restored, and it did not altogether disappear in the postwar years: the majority of Estonians believed and hoped that the Allies would not abandon them to Russian rule, that injustice would not prevail, and

that the Western nations that temporarily forgot the Baltic countries would soon return to liberate them.

The oldest author in the book was a schoolteacher, Hilja Lill, born in 1905, who belonged to the first generation of educated Estonian women. She died a few years ago, and her story was submitted by her relatives. It is rendered unusual by the fact that for a few days the author hid the ailing minister of agriculture of the Estonian Republic's last legitimate government, whom she later helped to bury secretly. As punishment, Hilja Lill had to spend 10 years of the second half of her life in a Siberian labour camp, and spent the rest of it as an invalid under the care of her relatives. In addition to Hilja Lill, the collection includes accounts of the years spent in imprisonment or "resettlement" in Siberia by Heljut Kapral, Hillar Tassa, Peep Vunder, and Valdur Raudvassar. The collective trauma narrative of those who suffered the crimes of the Soviet regime has many common threads, but does not lack for differences: the fate of the repressed depended on age, health, the place of imprisonment, but also on luck and coincidence.

Frightened by the terror of 1940/41, and dreading the repercussions of the return of the Soviet regime, 70,000 Estonians fled their homeland at the end of World War II to Sweden and wartorn Germany, and on to the USA, Canada, and Australia. Their life stories are represented in this volume by Evald Mätas, Tanni Kents, Hans Lebert, Heljo Liitoja and Raimo Loo.

Fortunately, some members of the generation of the departed and the refugees remained behind in the homeland. The emphasis in many of these life stories is on the complicated, materially restricted postwar years in Estonia. Included are a Cinderella story with an unfortunate ending (Tuuli Jaik), those who returned home in the ranks of the victorious Soviet army (David Abramson, Valter Lehtla), one story of a man who was mobilized in 1941, another who hid the uniform of one army only to have to don the uniform of the opposing one. In those days, it was important to keep in mind the saying, "A mouth is for eating," not for babbling about the past. With a bit of luck, one saved one's skin (Hans Karro); but fear was an omnipresent reality (Asta Luksepp).

Of those born in the 1930s, still children during the war, there are the stories of Aili Valdrand, who was deported to Siberia and had a hard time finding her place back in the homeland; Volita Paklar, an eternal optimist who found her way back to the homeland of her ancestors and finds joy wherever she looks; and a top scientist, Ene Ergma,

who is the current speaker of the Estonian Parliament. The youngest author in the book is Tiia Allas, who sharply reflects and articulates the life of her generation during the “era of stagnation.”

A life story is a text, but also one person’s interpretation of themselves and of their time. In the old university town of Tartu, the Estonian Life Stories collection in the Literary Museum, now houses approximately 5,000 life stories, of varying lengths and genres, from summaries of few pages to long microhistorical reports hundreds of pages long. Considering the collection efforts of other institutions, particularly the Estonian National Museum, one can estimate that at least 10,000 texts of autobiographical memories have been gathered in Estonia to date. Some texts are excerpts from memoirs supplemented with facts from family trees; others are family chronicles fleshed out by a range of supporting documents. These texts collected in the 1990s must be seen in the context of the memoirs, diaries and other autobiographical texts collected in previous decades. Not only are life stories and memoirs popular reading material, but they also provide perspective on the history of the 20th century through various people’s eyes, recollections, and memories.

Besides anthologies in the Estonian language, two collections of life stories have been published in Russian, one a translation of Estonian life stories and the life stories of Russians living in Estonia; the other of life stories written in Russian by members of different ethnic groups living in Estonia. To date, three collections have been published in English, *Carrying Linda’s Stones* (eds. Suzanne Stiver Lie, Linda Malik, Ilvi Jõe-Cannon, Rutt Hinrikus; Tallinn UP, 2007.); *She Who Remembers Survives: Interpreting Estonian Women’s Post-Soviet Life Stories* (eds. Tiina Kirss, Ene Kõresaar, Marju Lauristin; Tartu UP, 2004); and *Soviet deportations in Estonia: impact and legacy: articles and life histories* (eds. Kristi Kukk, Toivo Raun; Tartu UP, 2007). Widespread international attention has been aroused by Imbi Paju’s documentary film *Denied Memories*, and her book of the same title, which refracts 20th century Estonian history through the prism of autobiographical texts.

RUTT HINRIKUS

Estonian Life Stories and Histories

TIINA KIRSS and JÜRI KIVIMÄE

Life stories are a border phenomenon, poised—sometimes precariously, between autobiography and history. According to Eberhard Jäckel, “human life consists essentially of relations with the past.” He adds, “History is remembering subjected to order, a report of what has occurred; in another, colloquial meaning of the word, History also means narrative.”¹ Undoubtedly a life story is a narrative about the past, but history is not the summa of life stories, of remembered “great lives.” Though they share a common anchor in the past, life stories taken together do not yet constitute history. The relationship between life stories and history is more complex than it seems at first glance; where do individual life stories end, and the general history of a people begin? How do episodes of a remembered past become “subjected to order,” configured according to broader continuities and ruptures, structures of sequence, and emphasis, with or without the intention of explanation?

It is important for the reader of *Estonian Life Stories* to understand the nature of the collection and its component stories neither as “simple autobiographies,” nor “real history,” but rather as texts written in response to a summons to collect life narratives at a particular juncture in Estonian national history. This summons was issued as an open, public invitation with a specific form—life story writing competitions sponsored in the second half of the 1990s by an association of professionals and citizens, under the aegis of “memory institutions,” primarily the Cultural History Archive at the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu. The three-volume text *Eesti rahva elulood* (Estonian Life Stories, the first two volumes of which were published in 2000) emerged from the 20,000 pages

¹ Eberhard Jäckel, *Umgang mit Vergangenheit. Beiträge zur Geschichte* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1989), 118.

of manuscript submitted to the competition jury. *Eesti rahva elulood*, the source text for the 25 stories translated here, has a complex canonical status in Estonia, due to the way it positions itself between autobiography and history.² Accounts of the lives of “simple people,” accounts they have written themselves, may seem to be the very stuff of “lived” history—events and circumstances witnessed and experienced by real people. In view of Estonia’s historical destiny in the twentieth century, particularly the period of Soviet rule from 1940–41 and 1944–1991, as well as the Nazi occupation 1941–1944, the silences and official silencing of certain aspects, chapters, and social groups, further reinforce the assumption that now, finally, after Estonia is again independent, the real truth can be told and the blank spots of history filled in. A further implicit assumption is concealed in this undertaking—that “memory” holds the key to “true” history, a very old problem indeed, the contemporary manifestations of which historians and the scholars connected with the amorphous field of “memory studies” have subjected to an intensive and sharp critique in recent years. Such assumptions—that life stories automatically constitute compensatory or supplementary history, are misleading, as we shall attempt to explain below. These assumptions are politically suspect as well, given dubious but persistent “use value” that is drawn from life narratives, in Estonia no more and no less than elsewhere in Europe and in the world.

What kinds of texts are the stories that have been included in *Estonian Life Stories*? What is a life story? What is a history? And what have these terms, categories, and designations meant for Estonia and for Estonians? Since the life stories in this book cannot be simply inserted or slotted into a political history of Estonia (be this conceived as a history of the “land,” the “people,” or “the nation”), we have chosen not to begin with an overview of Estonian history, let alone with a diagnostic list of the problematic knots and nodes of twentieth century historical events that remain loci of public polemic and Estonia’s international image.³ Rather, we have elaborated on specific contexts of cultural his-

² Rutt Hinrikus (ed.), *Eesti rahva elulood* (Estonian Life Stories) I–III (Tallinn: Tänapäev, 2000, 2003); cf. also Tiina Kirss, Ene Kõresaar, Marju Lauristin (eds.), *She Who Remembers: Interpreting Estonian Women’s Post-Soviet Life Stories* (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2004); Suzanne Stiver Lie (ed.), *Carrying Linda’s Stones: An Anthology of Estonian Women’s Life Stories* (Tallinn: Tallinn University Press, 2006).

³ See Toivo U. Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, updated 2nd edition (Stanford:

tory crucial for approaching and reading these stories. On this basis we suggest some interpretive orientations for the patterns the stories themselves emphasize, and situate Estonian life stories provisionally in the fields of current scholarly debates about history and memory. The reader is reminded that a glossary and notes have been provided as guides to the landscape of each specific story.

I. Oral and Written: Life Story and History in Estonian Letters

In traditional societies, the life story is a form and genre of oral narrative. Stories about people's lives—ordinary and extraordinary insiders, as well as strangers—range from the everyday anecdote to long formal poems or narrative cycles recited on ceremonial occasions, births, weddings, departures, and burials. Life stories told and transmitted in the family or village network support intergenerational remembering, lengthening its span, which still rarely reaches back beyond one's grandparents. Not only the events of a person's life course, but his or her demeanor, behavior, and character make the oral life story a potent resource for education, "life-lessons" offered through examples in contexts of daily work and play. Oral storytelling, which instead of drawing upon an archive, flows into an immeasurable lode of tradition, is also inevitably selective: some lives are memorable, others are forgotten. Those that are remembered may have many faces, depending on the one who tells the story.

The writing down of oral tradition never happens automatically. As Jack Goody has shown, the transition to a writing culture is a process involving profound changes in cognitive operations, in the organization, culmination, and storage of knowledge, and in restrictions placed on those who have access to written texts.⁴ The shift to written culture is a defining one, and in many respects irreversible: while standardized written language provides a basis for distance communication, the reference point of a written text enables the stability of what Jan and

Hoover Institution Press, 2001).

⁴ Jack Goody, *The Power of Written Tradition* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 23–25.

Aleida Assmann have referred to as “cultural memory.”⁵ The complex consequences for oral transmission, oral genres, and “communicative memory” may include the atrophy of oral storytelling over time; with the instilling of reading habits, there is increased reliance on written media, such as sacred texts, schoolbooks, newspapers, or the calendar. However, there may be circumstances in which oral transmission of life stories assumes a new importance and significance, such as in regimes where written records can incriminate or endanger people’s lives.

The cartography of oral and written is a founding problem in the study of Estonian culture and a key to understanding Estonia’s particular profile as an imagined community, as well as the dynamics of its implicit or explicit ‘belonging’ to Europe. With respect to the passage from oral to written culture, Estonians do not differ significantly from other European peoples, particularly those in northern Europe. The Lutheran Reformation and the Catholic Reformation wrought and shaped written culture, and, on its foundation, learned culture. Establishment of educational institutions ranging from rural village schools to the university was part of this development, as was the translation of the Bible into the northern Estonian dialect, a long process that culminated in 1739. The first impulses and models for putting life stories in writing clearly came from German language and written German discourse, including locally particularized Baltic-German autobiographical forms, though the specific functions of memoir in the larger context of Baltic-German written culture have only partially been understood.⁶ Moravian Pietism, a religious movement that spread widely in the Estonian countryside in the eighteenth century, encouraged literacy and

⁵ Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique*, no. 65 (Spring–Summer 1995): 125–133; cf. Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskulturen und Geschichtspolitik* (Munich: Beck, 2006), 51–54.

⁶ Maris Saagpakk, *Deutschbaltische Autobiographien als Dokumente des Zeit- und Selbstempfindens: vom Ende des 19. Jh. bis zur Umsiedlung 1939* (Tallinn: Tallinn University Press, 2006). Liina Lukas makes some mention of Baltic-German autobiography in the context of literary studies in her dissertation, *Baltisaksa kirjandusväli 1890–1918* (The Baltic German Literary Field 1890–1918) (Tartu, Tallinn: Underi ja Tuglase Kirjanduskeskus, 2006), 639. See also Michael Schwidtal, Jaan Undusk (eds.), *Baltisches Welterlebnis: die kulturgeschichtliche Bedeutung von Alexander, Eduard und Hermann Graf Keyserling: Beiträge eines internationalen Symposiums in Tartu vom 19. bis 21. September 2003* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2007).

indigenous leadership of congregations, and included the written conversion narrative among its spiritual practices. The appreciable collection of these texts authored by Estonian peasants certainly belongs to autobiographical traditions in Estonia.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, biography and autobiography came to have new meanings in the context of the processes of defining the identity of *eesti rahvas* (Estonian people) and *eesti rahvus* (Estonian nation). Both in learned discourse about the *maarahvas* (literally “people of the land”) generated by Baltic Germans, and the writings of the emerging Estonian intellectual elite, life stories and histories are mutually implicated and not yet functionally distinct. Intersections between telling the story of lives and narrating collective pasts, and the struggle for their differentiation point to two intriguing theoretical questions. How long did orally transmitted life stories perform the functions of histories? Indeed, if in a people’s consciousness history emerges, cumulates, and is woven from the life stories of individuals, when and how do life stories and historical accounts begin to diverge?

Well before the nineteenth century, both secular history and life story were earmarked by elements of excitement and the exotic, which rendered them attractive to readers. When history recounted great and heroic events, it could not escape the criterion of the exciting. Participation in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 was among the favorite storytelling themes of the nineteenth century, and though we have little sense of the actual social impact of the stories told by the returning *nekrutid* (Estonians conscripted for long-term service in the Russian military), these stories have a much wider view of the world than the Estonian villager or peasant could imagine, and they are replete with elements of the marvelous.

The conscious elicitation of the history of the Estonian people came in the era of national awakening in the second half of the nineteenth century: it was the declared intention of both of its major activists and ideologues, Jakob Hurt (1839–1907) and Carl Robert Jakobson (1841–1882), to honor the worthy past of the Estonian people, and to urge people to study it. Furthermore, Hurt argued, a small nation must define itself through cultural stature rather than territorial size. Though quite different in ideological and philosophical orientation, Jakob Hurt’s *Pildid isamaa sündinud asjadest* (Sketches of Real Events that Happened in Our Fatherland, 1879) and Carl Robert Jakobson’s *Kolm isamaa kõnet* (Three Speeches to the Fatherland, 1870)

are calls to write and teach history; in Hurt's words, the fragments of the past must be gathered as essential grain to be stored in a national "granary."⁷ An important question in this context is to what extent this projected written history is history of the land (Est. *maa ajalugu*, cf. German *Landesgeschichte*) or history of the people (Est. *rahva ajalugu*, cf. German *Volksgeschichte*). Narrating the history of a nation mostly composed of oppressed peasants, envisioning and seeking to reconstruct a "golden age" before colonization, unavoidably made use of the Baltic-German cultural models through which these same peasants had been churched and schooled. The Estonians could not be the only players on this imagined historical stage: the German landowners, pastors, and schoolteachers, as well as German, Russian, and Swedish traders and soldiers cannot be erased from the story.

Jakob Hurt's call for the Estonian people to write its history was inseparable from his campaign to collect folklore; the oral tradition was regarded as "the people's own" national treasure that needed to be rescued from oblivion.⁸ Clearly, folklore collection campaigns proceeded from the perception that the old folkways and the songs that sustained them were disappearing, as modernization and urbanization began to have a significant impact on rural life. More importantly, collecting folklore in the 1880s was an active apprenticeship in valorizing a collective past. For Hurt, more than for his colleague and rival Matthias J. Eisen (1857–1934), folklore collectors had to rise from among the people, be equipped with local dialect and local knowledge, and hopefully "educate" their informants about the value of folklore beyond the practical exchange value of a song for a drink or a kopeck.⁹ Folklore collection efforts, though driven by scholarly impulses, were primarily motivated by national consciousness; there was often only a partial recognition that the folk story, folk song, or traditional custom was inescapably and irrevocably a hybrid. However serious the belief in, or pursuit of authenticity, and despite chaf-

⁷ Jakob Hurt, *Mida rahvamälestustest pidada* (What to Make of the People's Recollections) (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1989), 32–33.

⁸ Ea Jansen, "Jakob Hurt ja ühine isamaa töö," (Jakob Hurt and United Work on Behalf of the Fatherland) in Ea Jansen, *Vaateid eesti rahvushuse sünniaegadesse* (Perspectives on the Era of Birth of Estonian Nationalism) (Tartu: Ilmamaa, 2004), 19–35.

⁹ Andreas Kalkun, "The World of Seto Female Autobiographers," *Pro Ethnologia* no. 17, Perceptions of Worldviews (Tartu, 2004), 196.

ing, resentment or resistance, it was impossible to identify or erase the imprint and impact of the German “civilizers” (*Kulturträger*).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, when writing a national history became a conscious, political priority, people in Estonia also began to write down their life stories. The impulse toward written autobiography is contemporaneous with historical consciousness; people began writing down what they had lived through, using larger public or collective events as reference points. For those who attended school, even for a few winters, models and frames for writing life stories also came from the first Estonian-language school textbooks, which were written around this time. Two astonishing examples of autobiographical endeavors and achievements deserve special mention here. First, Märt Mitt (1833–1912), a politically active farmer, perhaps the first nineteenth-century Estonian to pen a full-length autobiography, titled his memoirs *Märt Mitti Elu lugu, Aea luguga ühendatud viisil kirja panema hakatud* (Märt Mitt’s life story, which he began to write down in a manner connected to History). Indeed, Mitt clearly designates “history” as the larger scaffolding around which he narrates his own life, which in Estonian is a compound noun composed of “time” and “story.”¹⁰ Second, beginning in the 1880s, Jakob Hurt became aware of the significance of the life stories of his correspondents and the informants collecting folklore in Estonian villages. Whether they were university students, local schoolteachers, or permanent recruits serving long years in the Russian military, Hurt asked his correspondents for a written account of their *own* lives. Dozens of these brief life stories or autobiographies can be found in Hurt’s correspondence from the 1890s up to his death in 1907, and these provide important clues about what average, or moderately educated, Estonians thought a life story was: its requisite ingredients, selection criteria for significant events, and patterns of causality. The components and structures of these cameo life-stories can in turn be traced to models in textbooks, newspapers, devotional or instructional texts.

¹⁰ Märt Mitt earned the credentials of a schoolmaster, was manor overseer in Kanepi, and one of the founders of the Tartu Farmers’ Association. He was a member of the *Eesti Kirjameeste Selts* (Society of Estonian Literati) and was active in the Alexander School initiative. See Vello Paatsi, “Märt Miti mälestused: sissejuhatuses,” (The memoirs of Märt Mitt: an introduction), *Tuna*, Vol. XII (2009), No. 1, 128–141.

From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, written Estonian life stories have a double conceptual structure, derived from the imprint of institutions of church and school. Temporal markers of Estonian lives were connected with the local church: confirmation, the church wedding, christenings (all too often also burials) of children, and funerals. These events were written down in church record books, and in families that owned one, on the last, blank pages of the family Bible. The framework provided by formal education left its marks even in life stories written down much later, as in the deceptively simple, but untranslatable rhetorical device *koolitee*—"school journey" or "journey to an education" which designates a highly esteemed cultural value. Going to school marks a crucial life transition and the beginning of a journey, whether this quest entails indefatigable effort to reach one's goal despite all obstacles—as for the writer of the first story in our volume, Hilja Lill (born 1905),¹¹ who becomes a village schoolteacher—or whether it is a truncated, interrupted, and episodic pursuit. This second pattern was typical of the eldest sons of farm owners (see Hans Karro's story in this volume) or the daughters, who were expected to return home to work on the family farm.¹² Perhaps the centrality of the "school journey" and measuring oneself against a scale of educational accomplishment are more significant identity markers in Estonian life stories than gender differences.

Some life stories in this volume are documents of successful, often very high academic achievement (Ene Ergma, Tanni Kents); other writers completed their primary and/or secondary education in normal conditions; older ones began before World War II (Elmar-Raimund Ruben, Linda Põldes, Evald Mätas). Yet several writers in this volume remark wistfully that their educations remained incomplete for reasons outside their control. For young men, mobilization or volunteering for the military (Voodel Võrk, Hans Lebert) interrupted education, often in the last year of secondary school; for others there was deportation (Peep Vunder), or the chaos and battle activity that closed local schools. For still others (Tuuli Jaik, Aili Valdrand) the reason ed-

¹¹ From this point on in the introduction, we draw our examples from the life stories in this collection, and refer to them by author's name.

¹² The second sons of farm families often had the chance to pursue an education beyond the local four-grade school, where this was financially feasible for the family.

ucation remained incomplete was simple poverty or ill health (Selma Tasane). Some studied the same subject under three different regimes (Raimo Loo, Juta Pihlamägi, Heljo Liitoja). Still others (David Abramson, Leida Madison) received all or part of their education in Russia. Amid the differences, what is significantly held in common is the high value placed on educational goals and achievement, and the ethic of persistent work devoted to reaching them.

Written life stories often end with a summary reflection on the whole of one's human life, as well as a judgment, humble or proud as to whether things have turned out well or poorly, whether there are regrets, unexpressed gratitude, something to begrudge or someone to condemn. Three seemingly contradictory concepts and proverbs, frequent in oral conversation as well, are often cited in life stories: *saatus*, or fate, is a term with a spectrum of connotations for that which one cannot control about the course of one's life.¹³ Seemingly contradicting the appeal to this dimension of mystery or determination is the popular saying "Igaüks on oma õnne sepp" (Everyone is the smith of his own happiness),¹⁴ which points to a much stronger sense of personal responsibility or individual agency. Finally, there is another popular saying, a laconic gloss from the biblical Book of Ecclesiastes, "Inimene mõtleb, Jumal juhib" (A person thinks, but God guides), which indicates at least a double, perhaps paradoxical relationship between the forces shaping a human life. Such stock phrases or "serious clichés"—along with some curious variations—abound in Estonian life stories. They are not absent from the Estonian life stories in this volume, most of which were written down, or at least made public, since the early 1990s. Postmodernism notwithstanding, such wisdom sayings have a resilient life of their own and continue into today's oral and written culture.

Indeed, as written culture creates its foundations, it does so both for histories and life stories. Early written life stories resemble historical annals; as the form develops, they come to resemble chronicles, with their interpolations of facts and descriptions. In addition to dates of

¹³ See Vieda Skultans, *The Testimony of Lives: Narrative and Memory in Post-Soviet Latvia* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), 47–48; see also Leena Huima, "Saatus tahtel," (As Fate Would Have It) *Mäetagused* no. 16. [URL: <http://www.Folklore.ee/tagused/authors/lhuima.htm>].

¹⁴ Estonian word *õnn* refers to good fortune or fortunate life-outcome, but the subjective and objective dimensions of this are impossible to untangle.

family significance, such as christenings, the network of characters expands: the names of godparents are written down in the family Bible. Perhaps information is recorded about places where family members have lived, or longer journeys they have undertaken such as emigrations to the Crimea, Estonian villages in Siberia, or across the Atlantic to America. People may write down notes about what they remember, on an ongoing basis as a rudimentary diary or as retrospective jottings in old age, even though a life of hard work may preclude sustained time to reflect and expand them into a longer narrative. Such notes and jottings, which can be found in the collections of the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu, dating from the period 1900–1910, could be considered fragments or “sprouts” of the new genre of the written life story. The memoirs of Gustav Malts (†1924) served as source material for Eduard Vilde’s novel *Prohvet Maltsvet* (1903), about Malts’ uncle, a popular Moravian Brethren preacher. However, there are some examples of life stories published in newspapers, as in the case of postal worker Mihkel Lindebaum-Sardo, who emigrated with his family to western Canada in 1906, only to take a realistic measure of the land and his own strength, and returned to Estonia. He published his account in the newspaper, warning his countrymen, tempted by waves of emigration west and east, against making rash decisions to leave the homeland.¹⁵

Another divergence begins to make itself felt in this period of the first decade of the twentieth century, with the appearance of written memoirs. A social faultline develops: memoir is the name given to what “famous” people and public figures write based on personal reminiscences; “simpler folk” have (only) life stories. There is a rich but shadowy terrain of buried or forgotten life stories, not considered worthy of publication immediately before and after the turn of the twentieth century, and one has to dig to find them in archival collections.

Periodizing Estonian Life Stories and Histories

Taking into account that a real temporal gap prevails between experience and inscription, between the “times” and the histories written about them, we can tentatively periodize Estonian written life stories, memoirs, and histories in relation to the “lived history” they re-

¹⁵ Mihkel Lindebaum-Sardo, *Minu väljarändamine Ameerikasse 1905. aastal* (My Emigration to America in 1905) (Tartu: Ilmamaa, 2006).

count. Beginning with the Russian Revolution in 1905, Estonians become caught up in the turbulence of great political upheavals. Indeed, twentieth-century Estonian history is a sequence of such upheavals: the 1905 Revolution, the First World War, the German occupation of 1918, the War of Independence 1918–1920, which culminated in the Tartu peace treaty of 1920 and an independent Estonian republic. In the early years of the twentieth century, stories from the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) come to stand alongside the narratives of conscripts who participated in the Russo-Turkish War. However, there is remarkably little autobiographical material recorded in the immediate aftermath of 1905.¹⁶ Granted, there was much rich material for the writing of memoir here, but the speed and intensity of the changes was so great that many people physically had no time and opportunity to record them in writing. There is even relatively scant autobiographical material from the 1920s. More distance in time was needed in order for the events of the recent past both to generate curiosity and provide a space for reflection. A surge of interest, and a need to reflect, rethink, and re-live these events also coincided with political imperatives. The attempted Communist coup of 1 December 1924, while generating ripples of fear, did not significantly imperil the Estonian state, which, at the beginning of the 1930s, was not in any real danger. The 1934 coup of State Elder Konstantin Päts and General Johan Laidoner, which followed the attempt by the right-wing Estonian War of Independence Veterans' League to take over the government, was a much more serious threat, and became both a litmus test of political views in society and an impulse to reflect and write about the recent past. Those who were discontented with the authoritarian turn found themselves asking, how did things turn out this way? Those who favored the turn saw the need to justify it, and those right-wingers whose abortive attempt at a takeover failed, felt compelled to underscore their influence on society.

Campaigns to collect oral history as well as written reminiscences about the events of the 1905 Revolution and local history more gener-

¹⁶ See 1905. *a. revolutsiooni päevilt. Mälestiste kogu* (From the Day of the 1905 Revolution: A Collection of Reminiscences) (Tallinn: Rahva Sõna kirjastus, 1931); Hans Kruus (ed.), *Punased aastad. Mälestisi ja dokumente 1905. aasta liikumisest Eestis I* (The Red Years: Reminiscences and Documents from the Movement of the Year 1905 in Estonia) (1905. Aasta Seltsi Toimetised II:1) (Tartu: EKS, 1932).

ally were organized by government and various associations; university students were recruited for this work and sent out on stipends. While more and more memoirs were being written by those in culturally prominent positions or the politically repressed, the 1920s and 1930s were not particularly productive as concerns the collection of life stories written by the people themselves.¹⁷ By the outbreak of the Second World War, there is no evidence that large numbers of Estonians had written down their life stories.

It was not until the 1930s that Estonian professional historian Hans Kruus (1891–1976) articulated the conceptual principles of Estonian national history.¹⁸ On the eve of the Second World War, the application of these principles had begun, both in school textbooks and in historical research—on Estonian national movements of the second half of the nineteenth century and, even more, on the revolutionary changes of the opening decades of the twentieth century. However, a level of academic maturity had not yet been reached in applying the frameworks Kruus had worked out. In this situation, historical *belles lettres* seemed better positioned to shape and influence the popular historical consciousness.

If, as we have argued, not enough time had elapsed for there to be a sustained and deep engagement with the events and issues of “recent history,” by the end of the 1930s, the right atmosphere had been created to facilitate such interest, both on the level of life stories and histories. Reminiscences of the War of Independence were being elicited and systematically collected—but most of this material was to perish in the Second World War. Indeed Estonia and Estonians once again stood on the brink of historical cataclysm. With the first Soviet takeover in 1940 and the loss of the Estonian Republic, any sense of (largely unwritten) recent history now collapsed. War brought with it Soviet deportation to Siberia in 1941, mobilization of Estonian men into several armies, flight abroad. The German occupation (1941–1944) not only did not reestablish the Estonian state, but also proscribed public discussion and writing on topics of national history. After the return of the

¹⁷ Johan Jans, *Mälestusi ja vaatlusi* (Memories and Perspectives) (Tartu: Noor-Eesti, 1940). An activist in the collection of reminiscences of the 1905 Revolution. His own memoir Jans (1880–1941) concludes with the early 1920s.

¹⁸ Cf. Hans Kruus, *Grundriss der Geschichte des estnischen Volkes* (Tartu: Akadeemiline Kooperatiiv, 1932).

Soviet regime in 1944, those left in Soviet Estonia lived on with fear-complexes instilled by what had been lived through and (up to Stalin's death in 1953) the continued anticipation of terror and repressions. In addition to political arrests and the flushing out of armed bands of partisans from the forests, there was another wave of deportations, directed at enforcing collectivization, which sent large numbers of people to resettlement in Siberia in 1949.¹⁹

After the end of the war, there was no prohibition to write life stories in the homeland, but their publication in uncensored form was impossible. Autobiographical texts were published very selectively, such as war memoirs that did not offend stringent censorship conditions, and even an autobiographical novel about deportation—not, however, to Siberia: Ülo Tuulik's *Sõja jalus* (In the Way of War, 1974), recalls the deportation of village folk from the Sõrve peninsula to Germany, moving them out of the path of the final battles on the island of Saaremaa in October 1944. Regardless of the smaller scale and locality of this deportation, only a small proportion of these deportees survived and returned home. Though Siberian survivors began returning to Estonia in larger numbers in the late 1950s, with very few exceptions, no Siberian memoirs could be published in the 1970s, or even in the 1980s.

Autobiographical information had other manifestations, public faces, and consequences in the postwar years: the official autobiographical document, the *anketa*, and the personal file, which served Soviet bureaucracy. These could determine one's place of work and residence, and educational opportunities, including one's risk of deportation and resettlement. Personal pasts and stories about them retreated to the hush of family circles, where even children were often not told about their parents' past lest they leak compromising information in school or be otherwise adversely affected. In broader terms, with the life story genre confined to circles of close kin, there was a return to orality. As a consequence, the discrepancy between life stories and histories grew.

While it would seem that conditions for life-story writing were more favorable for Estonians who fled into exile, this picture was also more complex and heterogeneous. There is indeed a flowering of memoir-writing in the postwar years, above all by those Estonians who had been in positions of leadership in the prewar Estonian soci-

¹⁹ See Kristi Kukk, Toivo Raun (eds.), *Soviet Deportations in Estonia: Impact and Legacy* (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2007).

ety. However, thick silences surrounded certain facts, such as serving in the German army during World War II, facts that were not looked upon favorably by the countries where the refugees resettled. “Estonia abroad” also practiced its own censorship, at various levels and by different unofficial and official means—the publication of certain facts was thought to be dangerous for relatives living in Estonia, an attitude that was intensified by Soviet propaganda.²⁰

After the Baltic Revolution, favorable conditions reemerged for the writing of both life stories and histories in Estonia. On a social (or collective) level motivation to narrate the past comes “from below”: it is almost as if the mill-wheel of revolution sweeps memories up to the surface. There was now a powerful impulse to write things down, “that my children might find out how things really were,” and the result was neither life story nor history, but something in between. After such long silence, strong motivations emerged to write didactically on the Rankeian principle of “how it actually was” (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*), though this last small wrinkle on Ranke’s famous statement is often and conveniently forgotten. Life story writers spurred by this popular (if not populist) motivation were not sequestered individuals, but people with emotional burdens of their own, casting a sidelong glance at others who also might be writing. On the one hand, there may have been an overt or elusive need to get things off one’s chest, things hard to formulate and hard to write down, on the other a stroke of jealousy or self-justification when looking across to one’s neighbor, as if to say,—“I, too, was someone important.”

The aftermath of the “Great Turn,” that is the Baltic Revolution, thus led to a virtual outpouring of the testimonies of “simple people,” who were also a ripe target group for general and systematic campaigns to collect the stories of their life experience, in connection with the “great events.” The rhetoric of the call for the Estonian Literature Museum’s first life stories competition in 1989 indicates clearly and intentionally the urge to fill in the blank spots of history with the narrated accounts of individuals, providing the detail that accounts of *grande histoire*—even compensatory or revisionist ones—leave out: “Minu ja minu lähedaste saatus ajaloo keerdkäikudes” (My Fate and the Fate of

²⁰ See Tiina Kirss (ed.), *Rändlindude pesad: eestlaste elulood võõrsil* (The Nests of Migrating Birds: Life Stories of Estonians Abroad) (Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, 2007).

those Close to Me, in the Labyrinths of History). Parsing this rhetoric, with its images of how people are connected, what or who directs the course of their lives, and the shape and nature of history, is a crucial prelude to the interpretation of the Estonian life stories in this book. We must go still further in our efforts to understand the fruitful tangle between life stories and histories.

II. Reading Life Stories

Who are the writers of *Estonian Life Stories*? Their introductions of themselves in the opening lines of their stories can be disarmingly, even poignantly brief, a formula with variations: year and place of birth, who their mother and father were, where they came from, and how they met. The writer steps forward on the credentials of belonging to a family, a place, and a time. Most, if not all, of the places will be unfamiliar to the readers of this collection, who may not know where Estonia lies on the map of Europe, its major cities, the geographical profile of its regions—not to speak of the locations of its small towns, villages or hamlets. It is not easy to classify the writers into “country folk” and “city folk,” since many of those born in rural areas go to town to attend school, later to work. The country/city distinction and the trajectory of individuals and families (whether they remain in one place for generations or move in search of better living and working conditions) is, however, an important one, both for understanding ways of life and grounding values, as well as ways of coping in hard and turbulent times. All but the last writer in this collection (Tiia Allas, born in 1972) have lived through World War II, eight of the twelve men as combatants. At the end of the war, five of the writers (Evald Mätas, Tanni Kents, Hans Lebert, Heljo Liitoja, and Raimo Loo) have left Estonia, and two (Leida Madison and Volita Paklar) are arriving there for the first time in their lives. Not all of those vulnerable to deportation were actually deported in 1941, as Peep Vunder was as a small child, or in the postwar deportation in 1949, as was Aili Valdrand. At the close of the war, political arrest and the Gulag lay ahead for three of the writers—Hilja Lill in 1945, Hillar Tassa in 1948 and Valdur Raudvassar in 1961, of whom only the latter two were dissidents.

Estonian life story writers can be grouped according to three “situational” or “experiential” cohorts according to the way World War II

shaped their lives, and where they were when the war ended: those who were deported, those who fled West in 1944, and those who stayed in the homeland. Another way to arrange the stories is on the model of the itinerary: how much territory does the narrator himself or his family encompass over the course of the narrative? Indeed, one of the most basic narrative paradigms in Western autobiography is the journey, with its forking paths of “travel tales.” In addition to those who took the long journey to Siberia or into exile, Hans Karro and others like him who remained in the homeland survived the postwar years by leading a peripatetic existence under a series of false identities. Leaving aside the question of typicality or exceptionality, such patterns alert the reader to practices that enhanced survival, regardless of the circumstances: skills for making and doing things (sewing, milking a cow, riding an ox or a horse, driving a car), knowledge of foreign languages (German and Russian, Swedish and English), resourcefulness, people skills, tolerance, and a strong work ethic instilled early in life. Common sense and survival skills are among many rich kinds of ethnographic information made available in life stories. An unusual example is Ronald Rüütel’s book-length life story, *Atarma*, nominally a deportation narrative, most of which is devoted to describing a Finno-Ugric river fishing technique that the author learned in Siberia as a young deportee in 1941.²¹

Embarking upon the reading of a collection of life stories challenges the curious reader to decipher and master entry codes, as is true for any genre of written discourse. At the threshold of reading any autobiographical text, readers face several adjustments of focus, both with respect to genre (what kind of text are they reading?) and reliability or trustworthiness. Who is writing and why? Is it articulating the experience of an individual telling a story, or making larger claims to truth? Life stories are mixed genres, containing codes that align them with the folktale, with literature, and with historical writing. Philippe Lejeune’s concise term “autobiographical pact” refers to the ethical transaction that takes place when a reader embarks on reading a life story.²² The writer’s proper name, his or her signature, confers the expectation of truth-telling, but paradoxical though it might seem, it does not bar in-

²¹ Ronald Rüütel, *Atarma: Minu elu Siberis* (Atarma: My Life in Siberia) (Tallinn: Faatum, 2002).

²² Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique*, 2nd edition (Paris: Seuil, 1996).

vention. Life stories are caught between the double impulses of revealing and concealing, the paradoxical tides of public truth-telling (including testimony) and giving account of the self. The features of *apologia pro vita sua* (reflection, explanation, and justification of one's own life) are not absent even from those life stories that seem to have the simplest structure and that avoid any philosophical discourse. Life stories are interpretive accounts: not only does this mean selectiveness about included (and omitted) events (such as my first conscious memory, initiatory transitions like entering school, the war, joining or not joining the Komsomol), but they are structured along lines of guiding myths, in which the writer acts as the hero or heroine of fairy tale or epic, who is tested by ordeals or goes on a long journey, survives and prevails; the victim, or the rogue (*picaro*).²³ While the autobiographical pact might constrain a writer to tell the documentary truth, the sheer magic of storytelling may result in an enchanted tale (Selma Tasane)—or a tall one (Voodel Võrk, Hans Karro, or Raimo Loo). Scholars of oral history know this effect well, and they acknowledge that witnesses of the same event may tell conflicting stories, that in retrospect one may look to oneself as much more of a rebel than one's staid life suggests, and that a storyteller sometimes lies, engaging in "just wishful thinking, gilded memories, or better-than-reality narratives."²⁴

²³ Jens Brockmeier and Donal Carbaugh, *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self, and Culture* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 2001); Paul Thompson and Raphael Samuel (eds.), *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990).

²⁴ Vilmos Voigt, "Why Do People Lie? Origins of the Biographical Legend Pattern," in *Suggestions Towards a Theory of Folklore* (Budapest: Mundus Hungarian University Press, 1999), 165; Luisa Passerini, "Women's Personal Narratives: Myths, Experiences, and Emotions," in *Personal Narratives Group* (ed.), *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). See also Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990). Readers faced with violations of the autobiographical pact—even playful ones—can become very angry, as Lea Rojola argues through some striking examples from Finnish public figures' autobiographies. See Lea Rojola, "What Eva Ate: Or, The Power of the Name. The Deceptive Author," in Päivi Lappalainen and Lea Rojola (eds.), *Women's Voices: Female Authors and Feminist Criticism in the Finnish Literary Tradition*. *Studia Fennica Litteraria*. Helsinki: Finnish Literary Society, 2007, pp. 89–110. On augmenting one's rebellion or resistance to social norms, see Luisa Passerini (1989).

These issues of reliability, truthfulness, and trust beg another major question. What we know of these writers is what they claim to remember—and what they choose to tell—their original reading audience: a jury in a life story competition, and a larger audience whom they imagine to be listening. The readers of *Estonian Life Stories* in English have to reckon with the necessary approximations of cultural translation—some nods and cues to the local (or national) reader are hard to translate, other codes are inaccessible or shut down, but can be compensated by footnotes and other scholarly apparatus. Silences and spaces between sentences may be charged with meaning, since these mark the boundaries of reticence, of what, in cultural and situational terms, is appropriate to tell at all.²⁵ How, then (not only how much, or to what extent) do these writers remember?

Memory

In life stories individual autobiographical memory is embedded in a collective matrix (or matrices) of remembering. The writer of a life story relies on his or her personal memory as a source, but usually also employs, consciously or unconsciously, the support of photographs, documents, and a family tree, all of which can engender or spur expanding clusters of smaller narrative elements. Oral stories told by relatives and members of the proximate community or village belong to this body of implicit or explicit sources. Some writers of life stories, such as Peep Vunder, are careful to note the limits of the power and extent of their individual memory, either by marking their sentences with phrases such as “I remember X,” “I do not remember Y,” or by referring to their informants and sources in precise terms. Other life histories do not demarcate the tactical operations of memory, or do so covertly or subtly. Either way, the vocabulary used to refer to memory is a significant point of analysis when reading life histories.

Clearly, the “remembering” at work in life stories is highly mediated by networks of relationship, education, personal reading, and social mentalities. As both Vieda Skultans and James Wertsch²⁶ have shown,

²⁵ Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007).

²⁶ James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Skultans, *op. cit.*

remembering and life story writing are mediated through textual resources in the cultural space: schoolbooks; popular sayings; political speeches; assigned reading (such as Oskar Luts' enormously popular novel about schoolchildren, *Kevade*, 1912) or songs. Life story writers either draw on these resources consciously (for example, Aili Valdrand draws analogies between situations in her own life and at least four or five novels), sketching out similarities or identifying with a favorite character, or less consciously—through approximate quotations or allusions to such texts.

In view of the controversiality of Maurice Halbwachs' theorizing of "collective memory," and the highly debatable assumption that it is undergirded by a palpable "collective subject," it seems best to us to speak instead, as Peter Burke does, of "social memory." By adding the term "social histories of remembering," Burke invokes the dynamic historicity of not only the content of social memory but of its processes, and raises questions about the modes of transmission of public memories and changing uses of the past and of oblivion.²⁷

The social memory and textual resources represented in the stories in this volume lead to several characteristic narrative strategies and devices. First, the genealogical synopsis with which life stories often begin is a custom with multiple intentionality. Is this an expression of a deeply-held sense of social or intergenerational continuity, a legacy of school instruction in history, or rather a very old tradition that comes from folklore or from epic literary forms such as the Icelandic sagas? Pragmatically it is a task of some complexity for a life story writer, faced with a topic such as "Minu ja minu lähedaste saatus ajaloo keerdkäikudes" (My Fate and the Fate of those Close to Me in the Labyrinths of History), to define who these "close ones" are, and to draw the line bounding the potential *dramatis personae* of the story. The narrator's life story is an insertion in a latent web of kinship narratives. Whatever explicit criteria may be used to define the "close ones"—such as the model of a traditional rural household with its extended family, hired help, and orphaned godchildren, implicitly these choices demarcate the perimeter of a circle of care. In the life stories of urban intellectuals, circles of friendship, affiliation, informal or institutional professional association, may supersede family or kinship formations. Thus, not

²⁷ Peter Burke, "History as Social Memory," in Thomas Butler (ed.), *Memory: History, Culture, and the Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 100.

only individual narrative choices, but tacit cultural factors governing definitions of *lähikond* (one's "close ones") and the closeness of the cut made in the genealogical fabric are significant to the interpretation of life stories. The gender of the ancestor the narrator mentions first, the number of past generations evoked, the splice or tie line between the narrator's story and the family story, and the kinds of stories told that connect place and family, all create variations on the genealogical opening formula. Also of significance are slips, lapses, incoherencies, redundancies, and factual mistakes made in the recounting of such genealogies, and in marking the outer temporal limits of the narrator's personal memory.

A second, related, "figure of memory" in life stories concerns ways in which the writer is connected to various small and large collectivities. The reader should pay close attention to this intermediate level of narrating local collectivities—for rural folk, this primarily means the village and neighboring farms, for city folk circles of friends and acquaintances around schools and organizations. For writers born in the 1920s, youth organizations such as the Young Eagles and Home Daughters had a formative impact, complementing the home in instilling a framework of values; therefore it makes sense that charismatic or authoritative youth leaders are described, while companions in these organizations are seldom mentioned in later contexts. For the seven men who were combatants during World War II, war buddies, often schoolmates, are spoken of frequently and fondly. Depending on the point of view, the subject of narration, while a self with an autobiography, is always in some sense "more" (and paradoxically also "less") than individual. This condition is radicalized in traumatic experience, and in the epitaphic or memorializing gestures of survivors: a Siberian deportee, such as Peep Vunder, takes up the stories of those who have died, disappeared, or been annihilated, those who cannot speak for themselves, and who may be buried in unmarked graves. In more ordinary terms (or more normal circumstances), the narrator is a node through which the strands of kinship cross, making the narrative always potentially polyvocal.

A third figure of memory is the "house tour," in which the writer calls to mind their home or schoolhouse, systematically describing their way through it room by room, including the yard and immediate surroundings. The rooms and outdoor spaces are populated with family members, friends, and farm animals, and there are descriptions of

the normal, ordinary round of life, punctuated by extraordinary events that intervened. One might even consider the house-tour as a narrative mnemonic technique; visualizing or kinesthetically “walking one’s way through” a remembered site may jog the memory to recall more details, though it may bring with it a frustrating ambivalence where memory fails. If in Linda Põldes’ life story the highly descriptive “house tour” approximates an ethnographic reconstruction of a *Lebenswelt*, in Selma Tasane’s story, the addition of elements of superstition and folk belief suffuse the home with symbolic, even ritual meanings. To varying degrees, the reconstruction of the home through description is connected to loss of the home place: neither Linda Põldes, Juta Pihlamägi, David Abramson, or Tanni Kents can ever go home again; Selma Tasane, while keeping her physical home, experiences it as haunted, as does Peep Vunder, who returns home after being deported as a small child in 1941.²⁸

A fourth organizing feature is the traditional folk calendar, which often provides the narrator with hooks on which to hang a story, and to which are added various national holidays. When Linda Põldes and Selma Tasane describe their rural childhoods on the island of Saaremaa, they recur not as dates in diary entries, but rather as St. John’s Eve (Midsummer’s Eve), Christmas, St. George’s Day (23 April), and Victory Day (23 June), the latter more frequently than Estonian Independence Day (24 February). Victory Day is indexical of the social construction of patriotism in Estonia in the late 1930s.²⁹

Marking Time

The examination of time in life histories leads inevitably to an analysis of textual structures and operations of temporality in narratives, which calls on the theoretical and interpretive lenses of historians, so-

²⁸ Ene Kõresaar, *Memory and history in Estonian post-Soviet life stories: private and public, individual and collective from the perspective of biographical syncretism* (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2004).

²⁹ Marek Tamm, “History as Cultural Memory: Mnemohistory and the Construction of the Estonian Nation,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Dec. 2008), 499–516; cf. also Meike Wulf, “Theoretische Überlegungen zum kollektiven Gedächtnis in Estland,” in Peter Nitschke (ed.), *Kulturvermittlung und Interregionalitäten* (Wissenschaftliche Reihe des Collegium Polonicum. Sonderband) (Poznań: Collegium Polonicum, 2003), 167–192.

cial scientists, and literary scholars, and offers no easy synthesis. Initial, thought-provoking observations can be made from life histories that focalize these large theoretical issues, to call Eberhard Jäckel's claims to mind. For example, is a life history written in the present or past tense, or a mixture and, depending on the language of the writer, what use is made of the grammatical resources of temporality in that language? To what extent is the depth and subtlety of the deployment of tense an index of the educational level of the writer, and what other sociological earmarks might it conceal? If past and present tense alternate, is the switch to the present tense connected to the degree of drama in the narrated event? And to what extent is the choice of tense connected to the operations of memory?

The question of tense in life stories points back to the development of written culture. The inscription of temporality is a matter of linguistic and cultural deep structure, and points once again to the fact of hybridity. While the aspect of temporality in the narration of Estonian life stories is certainly connected with indigenous cultural perceptions and practices of marking sequence and duration, one cannot discount the "civilizing" impact of the grammar of the written German language. As in other oral traditional cultures, in early examples of written Estonian life stories the past tense exists alongside the present tense of narration; hesitancy between them can be traced even in much later texts, particularly by rural writers. There is also the question of the formulation of the future: Estonian has no structure for the future tense. Needless to say, this has complex implications for the articulation of life goals and plans in written discourse, and for perceptions and attitudes concerning agency.

Other time markers of interest move toward the intentional or unintentional periodization of a life. If, as discussed above, Estonian history can be seen as a series of upheavals, life stories create narrative orbits around these upheavals that amount to compensatory continuities: broad-brush periodization, such as in expressions like "during the Estonian time" (the German time, the Soviet time). Into these larger frameworks are inserted stories of how specific battles or events touched the writers' personal lives. If some life story writers indicate their periodization scheme explicitly, such as Volita Paklar, who observes that her life could best be regarded according to its "decades," in many life histories temporal divisions are drawn from the pivotal events of personal and family life: (e.g. birth, going to school, confirmation,

military service, marriage). Examination of the choice and frequency of these pivotal events across a large sample of life stories from a given culture could be illuminating, as it would doubtless reveal culture- and gender-specific patterns of the life cycle.

The periodization schemes of *grande histoire* rarely serve as the overarching temporal scaffolding of life stories, though they intersect with and intersect the individual periodization scheme. Depending on the ways in which world events (World War II most significantly) impacted the narrator and his or her locality, dates from *grande histoire* become time markers, or boundaries of lived periods. One pervasive example in Baltic life stories is that draft-eligible men came to understand their lives as globally (and forever after) emblemized by *aastakäik* (their year of birth), which would be a major determinant of the army that would mobilize them, and sometimes radically differentiate their experience from friends a year younger or older. More interesting are examples of life stories in which certain well known reference points from public or national history are altogether absent, such as narratives that do not mention the deportations of 1941 and 1949. For some readers, such omissions create immediate suspicion, undermining the “autobiographical pact,” as if the writer was trying to hide something, for surely all Estonians were touched by these collective events? Perhaps it is far more accurate to say that in such cases, the underpinnings of the reader’s construction of national history are being revealed or laid bare.

Issues of temporal sequencing and order of narration are interesting and consequential, containing important indicators of the narrator’s sense of causality. A majority of writers of life stories choose a chronological vector from the past to the present, but rarely is a life history without loopings into the past, flashbacks and flash forwards, sometimes, as in Linda Põldes’ life story, resulting in lapses, such as the unexplained and unannounced disappearance of a major character in the story for a period, and sometimes creating awkward redundancies, as a Siberian survivor struggles to manage the effects of the Siberian era of her life on the period following her return. In rarer cases where the life story begins with the present, the flashbacks may be indicative of associative processes of the narrator’s “memory work” that breaks the narrative surface with forays into the past, opening heretofore closed chambers of the memory that the narrator herself was unaware of before beginning to write. Counter-intuitively, writing may lead to remembering, rather than the other way around.

A further issue of temporality concerns the “density” and duration of lived time, and qualitative perceptions of eventfulness and the pace with which time passes. Some periods of a lifespan seem longer to the writer than others, despite their length in chronological time. A simple example is Voodel Võrk’s subheading, “About the War,” for there is more to say about this eventful period than about much longer intervals of more placid living. How synchronous are the chronometries of social time and autobiographical time of an individual life? Why does the narrator of a life story report at length about a short period of his life, and then proceed to skip over the next ten years? In addition to these intentional (or semi-intentional) expansions and contractions in time, the life story text may also bear marks of an *accelerando* of historical time, as in the periods of rapid sociopolitical and cultural change Katherine Verdery has documented in her anthropological studies of postcommunist Eastern Europe.³⁰ Indeed, life stories may be indexical texts for locating ways in which too much change in too short a time overwhelms a person, resulting in disorientation palpable through difficulties in telling the story of a life.

III. Histories and Life Stories: Who Owns History?

“When the lilacs were in bloom, the Estonian Red Army soldiers returned home from Kurland.” (Juta Pihlamägi)

“I should say at the outset that the war did not touch our family tragically. Both my older brother and I went to war (with the front lines running between us), but both of us came home.” (Voodel Võrk)

“In 1947 we were listed as kulaks. And so my carefree childhood ended in August 1944, when my mother and I were left to manage the farm alone together.” (Aili Valdrand)

The historical consciousness in life stories moves simultaneously in both directions, along with the current of *grande histoire*, and against its flow. The life story writer knows local events better than the professional historian, while he or she overemphasizes secondary, even

³⁰ Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

insignificant episodes, since these details, occurrences and circumstances seem to the writer be the main thing. To what extent and in what ways does a life story writer signal his or her consciousness that the events of their lives have taken place both with and against the flow of *grande histoire*? How are causal, correlative, or other connections made in the text between significant events in personal and public life, little events and big events? Who or what agency is held responsible for these background events, and what degrees of power and will are perceived to be possible for the individual to maintain and carry out life plans? To what extent is the unforeseen alteration, distortion, or failure of those life-plans attributed to the fairness or injustice of history, to rapacious powers swamping a small nation? Conversely, what might be signified when a large event receives no mention in a life story?

A related question is how history is personified in life stories, as distinct from other impersonal or transcendent frameworks and forces. As Vieda Skultans has eloquently pointed out in relation to Latvian life stories, the concept of Fate (Latvian *liktenis*, Estonian *saatus*) belongs to the deep structure of the culture with its roots in folkloric traditions.³¹ A writer's use of the concept of fate in a life narrative is most likely beyond cliché on a scale of seriousness, and carries explanatory force, though it may also fall short of a full-bodied scheme of causality. Finally, life stories signal their connection to history in the degree to which their writers implicitly or explicitly have pretensions to be participating in the writing of history, even acting as "historians," revising or filling in historical accounts they deem misleading, incomplete, or dubious. Two separable subject positions are discernible here: that of the unique standpoint of an eyewitness to great historical events, and the spokesperson for a bygone or irrevocably destroyed world: in both cases the memory of the witness claims to stand between "the way things really were" and oblivion.

As has been amply outlined within cultural studies of trauma,³² the rhetoric of testimony is the rhetoric of justifying and redressing of wrongs done, of righting the record, demythologizing and dispelling disseminated falsehoods. Departures from this imperative or resistanc-

³¹ Skultans, *op. cit.*, 48–49.

³² Cf. Aili Aarelaid-Tart, *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2006).

es to it thus become especially interesting. The one hundred life stories selected for inclusion in the anthology *Eesti rahva elulood* (Estonian Life Stories) are a good diagnostic sample for the discernment of such multiple intentionalities, since one of the selection criteria was to represent as many types of destinies as possible for an Estonian who lived during the twentieth century.³³ Those who answered the call for life stories and submitted their narratives for the competition in 1999 did so having read Merle Karusoo's impassioned appeal for such a "memory bank" of Estonian destinies, by which Karusoo hoped to generate a repertoire of textual resources about the complicated recent past for future generations. Besides sensing that there was value attached to their singular stories, participants in the competition were at least moderately conscious of their individual stories connecting to a larger, shadowy whole, and helping shape the contours of a collective history.³⁴ Perhaps the availability of fate or destiny as an explanatory concept for individual life stories was heightened by its prominent place in Karusoo's call, though it would be difficult to test such a suspicion empirically. We discern interchangeability and symmetry in Estonian life stories between History, Fate (*saatus*), and God, with the latter invoked most rarely, and then by writers (like Heljut Kapral) with acknowledged religious commitments.

It seems difficult to confute that interpretive schemata, including meta-narratives of Estonian national history, were embedded in the elicitation strategies of the Estonian Life Stories project long before collection began: the total sample of stories was defined ahead of time as a canon of *petite histoire*. A crucial, though ethically delicate question is the linkage between the quantum or "weight" of loss and suffering in a life story and its eligibility for inclusion in this national canon. Individual sufferings, when seen as constitutive components of a tragic national destiny, may provoke writers to handle losses in particular narrative ways, emphasizing or enhancing their position in relation to the whole. Conversely, as Terje Anepaio has pointed out, the appetite for success stories in post-Singing Revolution Estonia may be correlated with deliberate efforts to pull off the black cloak of suffering and to stop talking publicly about Siberia, an amnesia that she finds

³³ Rutt Hinrikus, "Saateks," *Eesti rahva elulood* I, 7–12.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 7–8.

disturbing.³⁵ Speaking primarily of recollections of totalitarian regimes, Tzvetan Todorov rightly distinguishes between the processes of recovery (*recouvrement*) and use (*utilisation*) of memories. Though with a different set of cautions than those offered by historian Dominick La Capra, Todorov boldly and skillfully challenges the notion of incomparability or total uniqueness of accounts of suffering. “Learning from the past” can happen only if accounts (including testimonial accounts) are used as instances in a general category, as models to comprehend new situations. Otherwise, the past comes to “repress” the present in the psychoanalytic sense; the sacralization of the past is what renders it sterile.³⁶

What are some alternative utilizations of the past represented in life stories, including those from Estonia? Michel de Certeau claims that “life stories are most often the stories of hard work,” and calls attention to the dimension of everyday practices alluded to in the opening paragraphs of this introduction:

Giving a voice to the memory of “people who have no history,” they gather together and compose the polyphonic narrative of anonymous and fragile practices, tell the story of an indefinite proliferation of ways of doing things, and bring it into the common treasure of a cultural memory, as does, in another register and for groups, the animated history of the city and its staging in images.³⁷

We might well ask whether the Estonians whose life stories are contained in this volume are “people without a history.” Most likely they are not “without” a history, though professional history writing and research has rarely caught up with events of upheaval, or jumped the irreducible gap or time lag between experience and reflection. De Certeau’s concluding point is more sobering, however: “...it is also the recognition of a fraction of the culture of work that enters into memory, but with the limitation that often the tools, machines, and gestures of

³⁵ Terje Anepaio, “Eesti mäletab? Repressiooniteema retseptsioon Eesti ühiskonnas,” in Ene Kõresaar, Terje Anepaio (eds.), *Mälu kui kultuuritegur: etnoloogilise perspektiive / Ethnological Perspectives on Memory* (Studia Ethnologia Tartuensia 6) (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2003), 206–230.

³⁶ Tzvetan Todorov, *Les abus de la mémoire* (Paris: Arlea, 2004), 15, 30–32.

³⁷ Michel de Certeau, *The Capture of Speech and other Political Writings* (Minneapolis: University Minnesota Press, 1997), 132.

their users have already disappeared.”³⁸ This argument may prove to be quite fruitful in the interpretation of Estonian life stories, especially if we presume that the material continuity and mentality of the old Estonian peasant society declined in the 1960s.

Who Owns History?

At first, the question, “Who owns History?” might seem at best metaphorical; at worst, unjust. If history is taken to mean the past, as it so often is in public opinion and popular historical consciousness, then the question itself is unreasonable: the past *an sich* can neither be owned or privatized,³⁹ not to speak of changing or revising it. But the question gathers real substance if we consider to whose possession or power the past is subjected, or, as Natalie Zemon Davis had written, the question of who is entrusted with the work of constituting the past.⁴⁰ This problem is not a new one for professional historians; arguments about the continued effectiveness or supplementation of the historian’s methodological “toolbox” are never-ending, at least within the boundaries of the discipline. Selecting evidence, weighing it critically, granting acceptance to explanations, interpretations, and forms of representation are the criteria that differentiate the professional historian from the curious lay amateur. Yet even with the most stringent choice of methods and the pursuit of objectivity, the outcome remains a multiplicity of histories, because the historian, *homo factor*, remembers and lives in his or her era and is subjected to the demands and influences of that time.

The historian’s own present issues new challenges to history as a discipline: alongside the multiplicity of histories there has now arisen a multiplicity of life stories. The relationships among histories and life stories have brought up a range of dilemmas, which often focus on the thematics of memory and remembering. The writing down, collection, publication, as well as the scholarly analysis of life stories are worthy of

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Frank R. Ankersmit, “The Postmodernist ‘Privatization’ of the Past,” in Frank R. Ankersmit, *Historical Representation* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 149–175.

⁴⁰ Natalie Zemon Davis, “Who Owns History?” in Anne Ollila (ed.), *Historical Perspectives on Memory* (Studia Historica 61) (Helsinki: SHS, 1999), 20.

serious, thorough discussion from a number of perspectives—but above all from the aspect of the functioning of the human memory.

The Stalin era, one of the specific periods referred to or narrated by the writers in this book, serves as a good example of the gap between life stories and histories. So far there has been interesting academic research by historians on this period,⁴¹ but these works do not always include the particular problems of historical responsibility, victimhood, or “participation.” However, opinions, collective attitudes, and questions of blame continue to be in circulation in the public arena, and have been since the “Great Turn”; these have been opened, revived, or “derepressed” and articulated discursively. The unprocessed and unofficial substratum of collective attitudes is nutritious soil for the telling and writing of life stories, which, though their initial impulse may come from kinship networks or the suggestions of friends, envision a public reader. In “going public” as an author, the writer of the life story issues at least an implicit claim that, on the “authority” of his or her life experience, he or she deserves to be heard. The deficit in academic historical research creates the space for a plethora of personal, singular, life “histories” that reflect popular historical consciousness. The resulting imbalance is far from a “complete” or “corrected” historical record. Rather, a public shift in authority has taken place, a shift away from scholarly research and toward valorizing singular experience.

What lives and moves in this somewhat ambivalent sphere of popular historical consciousness, and how do life stories draw on it? Are life stories “expressions” of popular historical consciousness, and does this mean they are “more” or “less” than histories? Signs of the operation of historical consciousness in life story texts doubtless include a repertoire of clichés (such as the “Red Baron” Valter Lehtla refers in the opening sentences of his story), or leitmotifs at various levels of superficial or deep structure. These already indicate that the writer is not writing “pure personal truth,” nor navigating across a wide ocean of attitudes, judgments, and opinions, but that he or she is both deliber-

⁴¹ Olaf Mertelsmann (ed.), *The Sovietization of the Baltic States, 1940–1956* (Tartu: Kleio, 2003); Tõnu Tannberg (ed.), *Eesti NSV aastatel 1940–1953: Sovetiseerimise mehhanismid ja tagajärjed Nõukogude Liidu ja Ida-Euroopa arengute kontekstis* (The Estonian SSR in the years 1940–1953: The Mechanisms and Consequences of Sovietization in the Context of the Development of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe) (Tartu: Eesti Ajalooarhiiv, 2007).

erately and unwittingly writing themselves into that flow. The writers of life stories borrow from History in order to create a (solid) framework for the narrative of a life. If there were no scaffolding of *grande histoire* to borrow from, life stories would resemble Icelandic sagas. “The Stalin era,” “Estonian time” and “the Soviet time” are larger pieces of the borrowed historical scaffolding, while specific dates and (pivotal) events (Stalin’s death, the marching of Soviet troops across the Estonian border in June 1940, the Baltic Chain), are smaller-scale pieces.

The relationships of life stories with popular historical consciousness on the one hand, and with *grande histoire* on the other, are not specific to Estonia or to Estonian discourse. “Give us back our history,” as the slogans of the Singing Revolution proclaimed, is connected to contemporaneous phenomena in the rest of Europe and the world at large, where strong public voices have called for a revalorization of history; Pierre Nora referred to this public demand as a “memory boom”, in which he included the resurgence of interest in the writing and reading of life stories.⁴² One must be cautious and avoid regarding this as permanent or irreversible. Life stories may well be a kind of fashion, even a passing fad, which—in Estonia, at least, may come to be replaced by different forms and syntheses once academic history has compensated the existing deficit, and crossed the necessary reflective distances to fairly evaluate the past, including its difficult, terrible, and traumatic chapters.

In this context, the difficult matter of memory cannot be emphasized enough. When a “simple person” sets out to compose a narrative of his or her life story, memory is what he or she first relies on. Psychologists of memory specify that what is meant here is episodic memory, the capacity to remember experience.⁴³ The expression of human memory consists of two wondrous, tandem aspects—remembering and forgetting. When writing down one’s life story, the writer is at best only able to recall fragments from several decades ago, including significant events—details that have been engraved deeply in the memory, and stories about such events. When writing about our own lives, we splice together a story using language and style, and this is what we call our life story. But we cannot write about what we have forgotten, what

⁴² Pierre Nora, “The Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory,” *Transit –Europäische Revue* 22 (2002), available from www.eurozine.com.

⁴³ Endel Tulving, *Mälu* (Memory) (Tartu, 2002), 261.

it is unpleasant to call to mind, what is detrimental to us, or what is inappropriate. In the complex processes of remembering there are hidden reasons that simultaneously connect and differentiate life stories and histories. Life stories can offer histories unique kinds of evidence; histories can in turn offer writers of life stories requisite frameworks for past events, especially those in the distant past, and help in finding chronological sequences for the composition of a narrative.

In the postmodern era many frameworks of values in social life have disintegrated or been radically transformed; thus there seems to be no practical use for imposing hierarchies that differentiate between life stories and histories. In today's fast-changing, unencompassable world there is more value in reciprocal toleration and cultural diversity, which transcends the representation of both histories and life stories.



Hilja Lill

BORN 1905

My father Jaan Vehmer was born in the year 1876 in Latvia into the family of a poor farmer. My mother, Miili Taba-Vehmer, was born in Taagepera township in the village of Karjatnurme, the daughter of a blacksmith. At the time of my birth my parents were shopkeepers in the village of Karjatnurme, both had completed sewing school and earned extra income by sewing. I was born on 7 October 1905 in Karjatnurme.

My first memory is of the day of my younger sister Alviine Vehmer's christening (she was born in 1907, and her married name is Suurorg). I remember sitting on my father's lap at the celebration, and there was a huge plate piled high with *sült*¹ in front of us. When the table shook, the *sült* trembled, and this scared me. I also clearly remember a Sunday in my grandfather's house, about 1 kilometer from my father's store. It was a beautiful Sunday afternoon. I was a three- or four-year-old tot, and for the first time in my life I heard a special tender ringing, the enchanting sound of the *kannel*,² played by my aunt Anna. Such moments that touch the soul so deeply can spark longings that last a lifetime.

I remember very little about the house where I was born; it was a gray building like many others of its kind. But I can recall more of my grandfather's house, where I frequently went. Grandfather had bought a piece of land from Jaan Kase, the owner of Kaunispea farm, and already in the early days of his married life had built a place for himself there. It was a dear little nest with a house, blacksmith's shop, sauna,

¹ Jellied meat dish, usually made from pork, similar to head cheese.

² The *kannel* is a traditional Estonian stringed instrument, similar to a zither.

and outbuildings next to the village road. The house was surrounded by a garden with apple, sweet cherry and cherry trees; there were strawberry and raspberry patches under Grandmother's care, rosebushes and flowerbeds under the window.

Grandfather was a devout man. Every Sunday morning, wearing his white linen shirt with a stiff collar, he would sit at the table and read a sermon. He never forced us to take part, although he would have wished it. He was of medium height, lanky, with a bushy beard, stubborn and willful, somewhat vain (he liked to sit in front of the mirror), open toward his friends, and recalcitrant only toward his own wife. Both Grandmother and Grandfather were hard working, ambitious people, well regarded in the community. Grandfather was famous for his craftsmanship as a blacksmith. He gave his godson, the future General Soots, a beautiful little axe as a present. We would often watch him hammering in the blacksmith's shop and helped him pump the bellows.

At the urging of her family, Grandmother, a pretty, progressive young woman who held education and spirituality in high esteem, had married a man much older than herself instead of her true love, a schoolteacher. At our family gatherings she was always at the center of conversation and debate. Her four daughters were well respected in society, tastefully dressed, and hard working. Due to Grandmother's progressive attitude and ambition, all of her daughters completed sewing school and had the skills to make all their necessary clothing with their own hands. Their jackets with gathered sleeves, and eight-gored, lined floor-length skirts were long remembered. It was a great achievement to gain such esteem from the community in those days.

We lived in Karjatnurme for three or four years; then father found a new shop in Tarvastu township, in the town of Mustla. I have very few, foggy memories of that place. After another few years, the family moved once again, to the Nopli-Hansen farm in the township of Kärstna. This store was located by the main road. Father was ambitious. He wanted to get ahead quickly, and kept an eye out for new opportunities. His dream was to find a shop that would allow him to till the land and keep animals on the side.

Life went on at Nopli for a few years, then we moved again. The reason was that during the years at Nopli one of our cows had died. Mother thought that the old mistress of that farm had an evil eye, and had taken a dislike to our cow. Again, a journey lay ahead of us, from

the Kärstna manor to Mäeveski farm, two kilometers away, where there was a stone house, sad and lonely, with not a tree or bush nearby.

We were at Mäeveski only a short time. Father set up shop in the former tavern in the old Holdre manor, a long, gray building, everything under one roof. It was a bleak, barren area, with only ten or so ancient birch trees growing 100 meters away. But for Father, it was a dream come true: he finally had a field to till as well as a shop to keep. They bought a horse, and after awhile the barn had four cows and a pig. Father tried to manage the land on his own, leaving the indoor work and the shopkeeping mostly on Mother's shoulders. As children, our task was herding the animals. The pasture was near the house. Rising early in the morning was quite unpleasant. Often I was sent out by myself very early, to let the littler ones sleep a bit longer. No other work was demanded of us except gathering hay for the pig and peeling potatoes for lunch. There were no berry patches or apple orchards. Grandmother, who lived five kilometers away, would come to visit us in the summers with huge baskets of strawberries and other garden produce. Those were happy days, and the jars of strawberry jam made the joy last into the winter.

My parents' life was quite hard—there was a great deal of work to do. Father was so ambitious he gave himself no mercy. He was a skilled tailor. I remember being stationed next to his sewing machine with my alphabet book, a little stick in my hand to point out the letters. One day, as if by magic, I could read out whole words. Then my schooldays began. The Holdre township school was a few kilometers away. I was nine years old when I was handed a bag with sandwiches, and enrolled in the first grade. Instruction was in Russian and Estonian. Reading, catechism, and singing were in Estonian. About a month later, Neuman, the principal thought I was ready for the second grade. The school had three grades, one teacher, and about 25 pupils, most of whom were boarders. Every Wednesday Father would come to visit and bring me fresh food. My sister Alviine started school the following year. We slept in the same bed in the dormitory and shared all the joys and cares of school life. One February night I heard a strange pounding and pleading through my sleep. When I opened my eyes I saw a red glow through the window. The schoolhouse was burning, and the principal shouted for us get out. We quickly snatched up some clothing and blankets. We were told to leave through the principal's room, since the fire was raging in the hall by the pupils' entrance. I remembered that

the New Testament my father had recently given me was in my desk in the classroom. I ran in, grabbed it, and jumped out of the burning hallway, to join all the others, who were already squatting in the snow. It was a terribly cold night; everything roared and crackled in the fire. The first townspeople who arrived took us into their house to get warm. There we stayed until our parents could be notified of the accident and came to get us. There was suspicion of arson, since one girl, who behaved badly and was not a good student, had threatened to set the school on fire.

Summer holidays were spent herding our four cows. Mother had her hands full with work—every St. John's day she sewed us new dresses and bonnets, and when we went to hear the sermon in the cemetery, everyone remarked what pretty children we were.³ As I noticed in those Holdre days, Mother was pregnant a few times, but she never gave birth. All this was kept secret from us.

When autumn came, we were both taken to the Lints school in Tõrva (Lint was the principal's name.) The pretty little gray schoolhouse stood next to the Tultsi millpond. We were boarded with a craftsman's family. We did not stay at that school for very long. It was wartime, and the Whites and the Reds kept changing places.⁴ One December day the principal called us into the teachers room and told us the awful news that our parents had been murdered, and that we had to go and wait in our apartment for Grandmother to come and get us. It was as if we had been hit over the head with a club. We cried and

³ St. John's Day, 24 June marks Midsummer, the longest day of the year. The traditional festival begins the night before, on Midsummer's Eve, with a bonfire, swinging, dancing, and singing. On St. John's Day itself it is customary to visit the family graves in the cemetery.

⁴ The Russian Revolution, 1917–1918. Estonia, a province of Russia at the time, fell into the area directly behind the lines of the Russian northern front in World War I. Over 100,000 Russian soldiers were stationed in Estonia, 30,000 infantry and 20,000 navy in Peter I's naval fortress in Tallinn; and 13,000 reserve troops in Narva and Narva-Jõesuu. War brought local turbulence, scarcity of food and other necessary goods, and, more visibly in urban rather than rural areas, political demonstrations. The "Whites" or Mensheviks were supporters of the Kerensky government, which followed the overthrow of Tsar Nicholas II in February 1917. The "Reds" were the Bolsheviks, who seized power in Russia in October 1917. For the local impact of the Russian Revolution in Estonia, and impact on the project for local political autonomy and independence, see Glossary.

wished Grandmother to come quickly, since she seemed to be the only support we had left.

Our anguished grandmother arrived that same day, packed up our things, and drove us to Holdre. A horrifying scene awaited us there: both of our parents had been shot in the head. The apartment was cold and disheveled, and the windows had been broken. We huddled together in one little room, since we were not allowed to touch anything until the police came. The people from the surrounding area came to help make preparations for the funeral, and on 18 December 1918 my parents were buried in the Taagepera cemetery. Looking back, I can remember that everything was very shocking and horrible, but the mind of a child cannot take in the whole tragedy of the situation.

The day before the murder my father's brother-in-law, Mats Mooses, and his son Ernst had been visiting. This was a strange sort of family, and people began to suspect them of the crime. Later investigations yielded no results: times were turbulent due to the war. All we were told was that someone had knocked on the back door, asking to be let in. Afterwards, since everything looked like it was in order, at least from the road, the crime had only been discovered a day or so later, when the cattle started making so much noise that they could be heard all the way to Holdre manor.

This tragic event determined the course of our lives. Grandmother and Grandfather tried to liquidate our Holdre property, selling whatever they could. The money they got (first the *ober-ost* later the *kerenski*) lost all its value. The exchange rate was very low. *Kerenskis* were small bills, about 10 by 15 centimeters, connected in strips by the edge. Grandmother rolled them up small, stuffed them in a three-liter bottle, and buried them in the ground. When the regime changed, the exchange rate turned it all to nothing. At that time Grandfather was approaching 80, and Grandmother was between 60 and 65 years of age. They had no income to speak of besides what they earned from keeping two cows and selling what little garden produce they had. We now went to school in the Helme township school about four to five kilometers away. There was a dormitory there, and every week we took along a bag with provisions for the week. A year and a half later I completed the sixth and highest grade of elementary school. Grandmother, who valued education, began making arrangements for me to continue my studies. With the help of pastor Ustal of Helme, she had the necessary documents prepared and submitted them to the Tartu Teachers'

Seminary, where those with good grades were eligible for scholarships. To get to Tartu one had to go by horse 30 *versts* to Puka station, and take the train from there.⁵ That was only the second time in my life to see a train, and I was no longer as frightened as I had been the time when Mother and I had visited our aunts Juuli and Liisa in Sillamäe.

In the fall of 1921 I sat the entrance examinations for the Tartu Teachers' Seminary. The assembly hall of the Seminary, located at 13 Pepleri Street, was crammed full of desks, where about 100 applicants were seated. Tests were administered in Estonian language, mathematics, and singing. There were also tests measuring attention, quickness, and skill. Of the 100 applicants, 60 or so were accepted. It was a breathtaking moment when the teachers, led by school inspector E. Jaanivärk, appeared at the door of the teachers' room to announce the results. One of the loveliest moments of my life up till then was hearing my name read among those accepted. The course of my life was set, and there was a bright future ahead of me.

It was a new experience for a country child to attend school in town. It was quite a distance from my lodgings to the seminary. There were no satchels in those days, so my road to education⁶ began with a stack of books shoved under an arm. The school was a two-story building with seven classrooms and a large assembly hall. The first-year students were divided into two parallel classes: within the next two years, a selection would be made of those considered suitable to become teachers. In the third year the classes would be merged, and the students would choose areas of specialization.

The director of the seminary, Juhan Tork, was an impressive man, always reasonable and calm, taking his time about things. The school inspector was Erich Jaanivärk, a role model for all the seminary students. He was extremely proper, intelligent, and friendly. Schoolmaster Mihkel Kampmann⁷ went about his work in a matter-of-fact manner, and was inclined to be impatient, though he meant well.

⁵ A *verst* is a Russian unit of measure, equivalent to 1.067 kilometers.

⁶ The locution *koolitee*, see Introduction.

⁷ Mihkel Kampmann (later Kampmaa, 1867–1943) was the renowned author of Estonian school textbooks in Estonian language, history and geography, religious education, and logic. The most important of these is the two-part Reader for Schools (*Kooli lugemisraamat*) published in Tartu 1905–07, later expanded to five volumes.

I felt somewhat awkward during my first months at the seminary. A month or a month and a half before Christmas we settled down for serious studying: a good report card was a requirement to get a scholarship. Scholarships were awarded at the beginning of the new year, and—what a joy!—I was one of the fortunate ones. After all, this was my only chance to continue my studies. My grandparents were old, poor, and far away. They could not help much, but they did the best they could, unstintingly, with considerable self-sacrifice. The scholarship was 100 kroons. New subjects were added in the second semester—logic, psychology, pedagogy, piano. To practice the piano, one had to go to the schoolhouse. There was a piano in every classroom, as well as in the great hall, where we could bang on it during recess. Most of the time, though, the piano was occupied by Eduard Oja, Eduard Tubin,⁸ Alfred Karafin (Karindi), and the other musical luminaries. My piano teachers were Juhan Aavik⁹ and August Kiiss. By the end of the spring semester, I had a satisfactory report card, which secured a scholarship for the following year.

The summer passed as always, herding cows and doing household work. Sometimes I wanted to go to the village dances on Saturday evenings, but my grandmother would not hear of it. From the handwoven pieces of cloth my parents had left behind, I tried to sew some items of clothing for myself. In those years after the war there was not much to be had in the store. Underwear was made of handwoven linen. The uppers of shoes were also made of coarse linen, and rope soles were sewn on. Grandfather knew how to make lovely, comfortable traditional leather shoes (*pastlad*), but wearing these was somewhat a mark of shame. After the war charity packages from America were distributed, and we got a few things from America as well.

In the summer of 1923, my sister Alviine was also sent to the seminary. In the fall we went on our way to school together. Now our financial means became even more restricted. We were lodged at the home of a washerwoman. We no longer got support from our grandparents,

⁸ Eduard Tubin (1905–1982) Estonian composer and conductor, fled to Stockholm in 1944, where he devoted his time to composition. His symphonies have been popularized by the Estonian conductor Neeme Järvi.

⁹ Juhan Aavik (1884–1982) Estonian composer and professor of music at the Tallinn Conservatory (1928–1944), he fled to Sweden in 1944. Also mentioned in Heljut Kapral's life story.

and one scholarship was not enough for us both. I tried to tutor a few country girls, but the pay was often negligible—potatoes or a loaf of bread. Often we would draw lines on our loaf of bread, rationing it to last until the next installment of the scholarship came. All we had to eat with our potatoes was gravy made of flour and water.

Our schoolmaster, Mihkel Kampmann, became aware of our difficulties, and took the initiative to place us in the private children's home on Jaama Street, which was run by charitable Tartu women. The unexpected news of our placement there was both surprising and encouraging. The scholarship was taken away, but we no longer had to worry about food and clothing.

The children's home was a whole new world for us. It was run by Alviine Koch, and located on the side of a hill on Jaama Street, in the building that used to belong to the Vanemuise Society.¹⁰ The building had two and a half stories, large bedrooms and common rooms, all of which had been adjusted to the needs of a children's home. There were twenty or so children. The older girls, eight of us at the time, lived on the lower floor, and the little children upstairs. In the second floor dining hall a long table was set every day, with a plate of sandwiches, coffee, and tea for each child, morning and evening. At the midday meal we could help ourselves to as much as we wished from a common serving dish. We were awakened every morning at 6:30, washed with cold water, and tidied our room. The older girls took turns helping in the kitchen and cleaning. A large garden with old trees surrounded the building, so there were plenty of opportunities for sports and recreation. Our matrons were reluctant to let us take part in town amusements, but everything was possible as long as there was a good reason. For Christmas the ladies brought us piles of Christmas cookies, sweets, and used clothing. The years flew by, and I began to get a sense of my own life, and my hopes and dreams.

I had a little hobby that set me apart from the others. Since I was a good gymnast, one of the teachers asked me to teach some girls to perform a dance, which she called a choreographic fantasy entitled "Estonia." It was a historical piece, portraying the Estonian past: serfdom, the national awakening, short lived freedom, more struggles and decline, another upswing, and the intoxication of victory. Red and green Bengali footlights were used at the performance, and when the dance

¹⁰ Vanemuise Society, see Glossary.

was almost over, the smoke from the lights made the audience cough. Later on, at school anniversary celebrations, there would be more opportunities to dance on stage.

My grandmother died during my third year at school. Grandfather survived her and moved into a friend's apartment. He died in the winter of 1928, and was buried at the Taagepera cemetery.

I graduated from the seminary in 1927, and the next concern was finding a job. In those years there was a surplus of teachers in Estonia. Each newspaper advertisement for a teaching post drew up to 20 candidates, only one or two of whom would get a position. I, too, applied in four or five places. Most of the time the jobs would be given to men, or to those who knew the county officials. What worked against me was my short height and childlike demeanor. After reading the advertisement for Karksi, I rode the train from Tartu to Puka. Salme's father picked me up with a horse and cart and drove me to Tõrva, and I walked from there to Karksi. I was early, and took a nap in a nice stack of clover by the road. I dreamed that I was on the last rung of a long ladder leading to an attic, and that I hopped up effortlessly into the loft. That dream gave me hope.

There were twenty or so people waiting at the county hall. Through a stroke of fate, the job fell to me. On the basis of grades my classmate Jüri Tikk was their first choice. But I knew that a few days before he had been selected by the Nõo school near Tartu, and that he had accepted that post. I took it upon myself to clarify the situation, and that was how they chose me. I was happy as never before.

Thus I embarked on my own journey in life—full of hope and the carefree inspiration of youth. I got lodgings in a little room on the top floor of the schoolhouse, and began my new life in a little empty chamber. I must have gotten a small sum of money from the children's home to keep myself going until the first paycheck. My first school council meeting was in September 1927. The Nuia elementary school consisted of three buildings. Most of my classes took place in the same schoolhouse where I lived. Classes for the first and second grades were held there, an average of about 30 lessons a week. There were seven grades and seven teachers in the school at the time, and up to 300 pupils.

When I started, the principal of the school was Mihkel Luukas, a very authoritative figure. He taught mathematics and singing and directed the school choir. Besides the principal and one teacher about 50 years of age, we were all young. I was well accepted among the

teachers. I was tiny—many of the schoolboys were taller than me, but with good humor one could get along with them.

At the end of September I got my first two months' wages. How little is needed for happiness! I went to Viljandi and bought a fall overcoat, a hat, a sweater and a few other things. The world seemed wide open before me.

On the day I moved to Nuia, Anna Lill announced that her brother Jaan was coming to visit that evening. We went to Viljandi together to meet the bus. At the time I could not imagine that that night I would meet my fate.¹¹ From far off I saw a tall gentleman coming toward us in a loose-fitting gray coat, wearing a hat, and carrying a walking stick. I had seldom seen such an impressive fellow. His impeccable appearance made me somehow awkward, and I admired him from a distance. I will always remember how he greeted his slight mother. When he was still far away, he pulled off his hat, then hugged her and kissed her hand. What charm there is in a person who is well dressed and well mannered! Jaan stayed there as a guest for several weeks.

I started settling into my new life. From a local carpenter I ordered a small bookshelf, chair, and side table, where I could put a vase of flowers. At first, the Püksi family offered me board for the main meal, and I was on my own for breakfast and the evening meal. This was not easy, for I had no kitchen or tableware. I was happy and contented, though. Life seemed free of care and full of hope, especially since I had been fortunate enough to get a job at a time when there was a surplus of teachers. This was a rare privilege.

Jaan was a true gentleman who took time for me and played Schumann's "Dream" on his violin at night in the room below mine. He was a good companion. The days passed until one December day Jaan followed me into the dark pantry, seized me in his arms, and kissed

¹¹ There are two main connotations to the Estonian word *saatus*. The first is more general, and can be translated either fate or destiny, and refers to those areas and aspects of life that are not in the individual's control. The second, more specific meaning, refers to love: meeting one's fate means meeting one's intended. The paradoxes of agency, choice and "determinism" evoked by the word *saatus*, very similar to the Latvian word *liktenis*, are addressed by Vieda Skultans in her study of Latvian post-Soviet life stories (see bibliography). Other life stories in this volume use the term in significant and extended ways (see Selma Tasane), though there is hardly a life story that does not in some way touch upon the term, or reflectively comment on it.

me passionately right on the mouth, driving my wits right out the window. I had never experienced such powerful feelings before. Thus began days of inner tumult, longing, and hope. Jaan had taken a job as a bookkeeper in the local Consumers' Cooperative store.¹² That was how our love began, and we tried to keep it under wraps at first. Neither Jaan's sister nor his mother particularly liked the idea. They tried to keep us from meeting and even tried to find him another match.

When the summer holidays came after my first year of work, our love burned with a high flame. We decided to take a short hike to the north coast, and spent a week with my aunt Liisi.

Since Jaan's education had been interrupted by the turbulence of the war years, he decided to finish it at Tallinn's English College. Our time of separation seemed like an eternity of letter writing and waiting.

Aside from my work at school there were many social activities—the choir, the acting circle, the “literary trial” society,¹³ the housewives circle, etc. For parties one always had to sew something new. Such a special occasion was so exciting that everyone wanted to make a splash. During the second summer of our love, Jaan and I would spend our days off together in various places in Estonia, and in Tallinn as well. On 29 September, 1929 our marriage was registered in the Tallinn City Council hall. We had such slender means that there was nothing to splurge on. I went back to Karksi, and Jaan stayed on in Tallinn. It was all a surprise to my colleagues, and much to the chagrin of the single ones among them, I, the youngest, had been the first to get married.

Soon after that Jaan's sister Anna married Juhan Arraste, a graduate of the Tallinn Seminary, who got a job in the three grade Lang Elementary School near Nuia. With the family's move, I was given one of the larger rooms on the first floor, and now had more space, though my slender means were a constant burden. But the beginning of Jaan's and my life together was a deep joy. Because of his cheerful

¹² A local branch of the ETK (*Eesti Tarvitajateühistute Keskühisus*), the central organization of cooperative commerce.

¹³ “Literary trial”: A quasi-theatrical performance, in part spontaneous, in part scripted, that consisted of putting the characters of a literary work “on trial.” For example, Faust is the defendant, and the prosecutor reads the accusation, and there is a verdict in the end. In the late 1930s literary trials on the Volume IV of Tammsaare's classic novel *Tõde ja Õigus* (Truth and Justice) were especially popular. See Tanni Kents' life story for another account of the “literary trial.”

personality and his witty manner, Jaan was very highly regarded in the local community. I really must admit that most of what is intellectual in me comes from Jaan. If destiny had led me to marry someone else, the path of my development might have been very different. Jaan deepened my appreciation for art and music, and my comprehension of spiritual values. He sang and played the violin well, and had a good collection of art reproductions. All of these values took root in my soul, and for this I will be thankful to him for the rest of my life. We got along very well, and I must say that our 15 years of life together were the loveliest time of my life. We wanted to improve our material prospects, since it was the custom in country places for everyone to try to outdo one another. Jaan cultivated connections with Luukas Lembit, a former student of mine, the son of a wealthy farmer. They started to buy up apples and market them in Tallinn (for a short time in Finland as well, until the new customs regulations went into effect). I, too, found myself busier in the summers, and would sometimes go along to market. We now had more money, could afford to be better dressed, and to furnish our apartment. In one year we were able to buy an oak-finished set of furniture, of which one bookshelf remains. When my fellow teacher Soller's husband, a driver, bought himself a truck, we made up our minds to do the same. Jaan brought a "Volvo" truck from Tallinn (half on credit), and now we began doing business on wheels. (After the Bases Treaty of 1939 the truck was requisitioned to Klooga, and was later expropriated).¹⁴

At that time Nuia was a small country settlement. In the middle there was an open square where they held market on Wednesdays. One could get all one's food provisions there: butter, milk, meat, eggs, as well as some items of clothing. Three highways branched out from the market, toward Viljandi, Tartu, and Pärnu. In those days the Viljandi road led straight down a high clay hill. On the square at the bottom of the hill three oaks were planted in honor of Konstantin Päts¹⁵ who had cut the ribbon at the opening ceremony for the highway. At first there was only one store in Nuia—the Lõmpsi store. Later on it was joined by the ETK store, a butcher shop, and a few bakeries. The restaurant

¹⁴ Bases Treaty with the Soviet Union in 1939, referring to the pact of non-aggression forced on Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, as a result of which Soviet military bases are established in Estonia beginning in October 1939.

¹⁵ First President of the Estonian Republic, see Glossary.

kept by the J. Libe family was located in the valley by the Nuia–Abja road. At first there was one savings bank; Riso’s bank came later. There were two clubhouses—the firemen’s association and *Ivakivi*, the farmer’s association,¹⁶ located in a red brick building in the middle of the village. The name *ivakivi* came from an ancient sacrificial stone found in the county. Both clubhouses were true centers of community activity. At parties plays were put on, and there was choir-singing, as well as solo performances. The staff of the agricultural school housed in the lovely Polli manor house also took part in these celebrations. Twice a year there was a county fair by the Kitsemäe marsh. This was a big day, when even the herders’ children had time off. Bands of gypsies were camped out well ahead of time, and often stayed for some time afterwards. The fairs were crowded and noisy. Farm animals were sold, and there were all kinds of booths offering fine wares, sometimes even a circus.

In those days schoolteachers were expected to participate in the work of local associations. There were 16 voluntary associations in Nuia, and only the Farmers’ Association and the Dairy Farmers’ Association were considered optional for teachers. There were no other cultural leaders at that time. Theatrical productions, choirs, teas, and other events needed the support of the local schoolteacher. I took the initiative to found the Nuia Kindergarten Association, which was active in the summers. Associations held dances and gatherings often, and even operettas and plays were performed.

The last years before the Base Treaty with Russia were carefree and merry. Family life went smoothly, the work at school was progressing, and we had good relations with the parents. We strove toward a brighter future, and life in Estonia was flourishing in a spirit of hope and optimism.

In the summer and fall of 1939, sinister omens were in the air. In the north hundreds of our Finnish brethren marched on the road to war, and cannons roared in the southeast in Poland. Our hearts were heavy.

Orders came from the town hall that it was prohibited to move on and around the roads. Windows had to be covered. Then, one gray morning a long caravan of small, mudcolored trucks, full of seedily-

¹⁶ For voluntary associations, see Glossary; Clubhouses (*seltsimaja*) were used for a variety of community activities.

dressed soldiers began driving past the Nuia schoolhouse. The time of the military bases had come.

The spring and summer of 1941 were full of agitation and fear. Inexplicable things were happening. On 13 June 1941 there were no cars on the roads, and things were strangely quiet. Early the next morning I was awakened by the rumbling of a truck that stopped at the gate of the neighbor's house. I looked out—soldiers were grouped around the truck. About a half an hour later August Tilk, the owner of the house, emerged with his wife, carrying bundles wrapped in bed sheets. The deportations began, and a deathly fear spread through the town. Of course, no one knew who would be next, or where to hide. The unfortunate ones were herded together in Viljandi in a pen surrounded by barbed wire. Their journey into the unknown began a few days later.

On 23 June the war began. Supporters of the Red regime were evacuated.¹⁷ From Karksi County about 100 people were evacuated to Russia. Local people, men especially, hid themselves in the forests, since the Germans were supposed to arrive soon. My husband, Jaan Lill, was also among them. On 6 July, when the Russian troops had retreated, my husband wanted to come to the schoolhouse to investigate the situation. Suddenly he saw a band of Red Army soldiers, stragglers, who had fallen behind the others. He wanted to flee, but he was too late. He was killed. The next day German forces marched into Karksi-Nuia. We could breathe a bit more easily under their rule.

Late summer 1944—a time that cramped the spirit, bringing heavy thoughts. At the beginning of September strange wagons began streaming in from the direction of Tartu, only a few at first. It was like a gypsy wagon train, piled with all kinds of bundles, children sitting on top of them, many with a cow or a horse tied behind. Day by day the flow thickened, a steady stream of unhappy wanderers. These were war refugees from Estonia's southern counties (Võru and Petseri).

This was how it was in the days when the horizon toward Tartu grew hazy, a forecast of a great catastrophe to come. Many of those living in Karksi-Nuia also joined the procession of refugees, because fear paralyzed their ability to think rationally. I joined ten other families that took their most valuable possessions and hoped to get as far as Pärnu or Tallinn by truck. As we crossed the Pärnu River on the 23rd

¹⁷ Evacuation, see Glossary.

of September, we heard that Tallinn had been taken by the Reds that morning. That was the end of the road for all those caravans...

In order to get out of the way of the Russian troops, we turned off the road at a farm in Are township, where we were allowed to make a stop. That same day the first Russian units spread out among the neighboring farms to look for partisans. They did not trouble us. The next day we heard that German troops had blown up the Pärnu bridge, cutting off our return route. It was not until a few weeks later that Karl Allikvee and I decided to bicycle to Nuia to check out the situation. Outwardly, the town was unscathed, the departing German troops had not burned and pillaged. The Reds, though, had torn about everywhere, demolishing and ransacking houses, looting storage buildings and slaughtering animals in the surrounding farms. Whatever there was to be had in the schoolhouse had been destroyed. The furniture and the walls were smeared with excrement, books were torn to shreds. Fires had been built in the rooms to roast chickens and geese.

At the beginning of October, my long-time acquaintance Lehte Soots-Kõdar, the daughter of Leeli farm came to see me in the schoolhouse along with prof. Karl Liidak, a well-known figure in the field of agriculture, with whom I had been previously acquainted.¹⁸ Liidak talked about Estonian politicians' underground work during the German occupation with the goal of restoring Estonian independence. Since those efforts had failed, he had been living illegally under the false name Karl Lepik. He asked for shelter for a few days. I was able to take him in, up to the beginning of school in November. I had a little room next to the kitchen where he could stay unnoticed. Sometimes in the evenings, he would go out for a walk.

After his stay with me, Liidak went to Rimmu township, to stay with the Kallit family at Meose farm. I was able to get him a ride there, since in those turbulent times a solitary walker would have aroused suspicion. In January 1945 Kallit came to the schoolhouse and said Liidak

¹⁸ Karl Liidak (1889–1945) was an agronomist, Minister of Agriculture in Otto Tief's government, which attempted to reestablish Estonian independence in a doomed effort between the end of the German and the beginning of the second Soviet occupation in September 1944. Hid from the Soviets in the Fall of 1944 in various places in Viljandi county under the false name Karl Lepik, he died 16 January 1945. Hilja Lill was one of those who hid him, and participated in his burial. This became the cause for her arrest and deportation to a Soviet prison camp. On Otto Tief's government, see Glossary.

had been brought to the Nuia hospital with a heart problem, and that he wished me to visit him. As I spoke with Karl Liidak, I understood that he thought death would be the best solution for him. Indeed, on 13 January 1945 news came of K. Liidak's death. With the help of Lehte Kõdar and a few friends we organized his funeral. Russian Orthodox priest Vainola performed the rites. Prof. Karl Liidak was buried in the Nuia Lutheran cemetery on the (Leeli) Soots family plot.

During the time he was in hiding Liidak had grown a beard, giving him a certain resemblance to Jüri Uluots.¹⁹ Some kind of rumor to that effect sprang up among the local people. Already in February an NKVD major from Viljandi came to visit, interested in the particulars of Karl Lepik's death. In March 1945 he came again, along with four soldiers and announced that the grave of K. Lepik, who had been buried in January, was to be opened in order to confirm the identity of the deceased. I was called to be a witness. The grave was dug up and the casket opened. The corpse looked like it was sleeping, and there were no noticeable changes. I had to confirm that the corpse lying in the casket was Karl Lepik, not Jüri Uluots.

On 5 May 1945, the same major came a third time to take me to the Viljandi NKVD²⁰ headquarters to provide some information. An inventory of my possessions was written up, and they wanted to put me in the cellar of the town hall for the night. On the authority of local *müilits*²¹ officer Hans Tammsaare, I was allowed to spend the night at home instead.

In Viljandi I was taken to the NKVD supervising officer major Johan Mägi,²² who put me under arrest. The chief guard was Leo Rennit (the nephew of the writer of the song "Mu meelen kuldne kodukotus"),²³ who was well-intentioned and helpful in every way.

¹⁹ Jüri Uluots (1890–1945), attorney and professor of law, member of Parliament, Prime Minister of the Estonian Republic in 1939–1940 up to the first Soviet occupation of Estonia in June 1940. Upon the arrest and deportation of President Konstantin Päts in July 1940, he became Prime Minister in the duties of the President. He fled into exile in Sweden in September 1944.

²⁰ NKVD (Soviet Secret Police); see Glossary.

²¹ *Müilits*, Soviet civilian police.

²² Johan Mäe was a man from Polli Peraküla, in the Karksi area.

²³ Andres Rennits song *Mu meelen kuldne kodukotus*, a nostalgic song about a happy country childhood and the changes brought by the passing of years to the childhood landscape, also mentioned in Asta Luksepp's life story.

I was kept at the Viljandi NKVD headquarters for over a month without food. I was helped by those among the guards with a sense of humanity, and by the parents of several schoolchildren who brought food packages.

At the end of June I was taken from the NKVD headquarters to the Viljandi jail. The body search was thorough: all zippers and buttons were cut off, I was stripped, ordered to squat, and a hand passed across my private parts. The cells were narrow and of course very stuffy. Food rations were as everywhere else: a typical midday meal was sauerkraut soup made with water. At night, one could hear the sound of flogging and the screams of men. It was horrible.

About a month later I was taken with a group of prisoners to the Patarei prison²⁴ in Tallinn. Living conditions there were very cramped: up to 25 people were crammed into a cell meant for seven. We slept like herring in a tin, heads against the wall, legs jumbled together. For food we were given 400 grams of bread a day, a teaspoon of sugar, fish head soup. I met a few people I knew: my student Salme Rauks, and the mistress of Meose farm, Otilie Kallit, who had also been arrested for hiding Liidak. Other cellmates were Anette Subbi, Liisa Pärn (a school-teacher), Heldi Ponomarjova, Irma Toff, Vilma Saar, Roosa Tanelson, Sullakatku, a student from Valga named Orlova, with the nickname “Kiki,” Leida Kiviräk, Tiiu Mikiver-Oinas. In the cell next door were some men from Karksi: Olev Vanker, Arvo Raabe, the principal of the Nuia elementary school Arno Pärt, my student Ants Sault (he had cut Stalin’s picture out of the paper, poked out the eyes and tacked it to the wall in the wc—for this he was given five plus ten years).

In the Tallinn Patarei prison, the investigation of the Kaarel Liidak (Karl Lepik) case began. I was “worked over” by three Russians and an Estonian investigator. Their behavior was rather polite. Interrogations were conducted only at night. The most disgusting and humiliating thing was baiting us in an attempt to recruit us as informers. Since I resisted the temptation, my case was taken before a tribunal.

On 18 February 1946, I was taken in a “Black Crow”²⁵ to Roosikrantsi Street in Tallinn to face a military tribunal. I faced 8 angry men alone, against the backdrop of the huge court table. There

²⁴ Patarei prison, see Glossary.

²⁵ Also known as a “Stolypin prison wagon,” a windowless black van in which the prisoners rode, tightly crammed together.

was not much questioning, it took only about 10 minutes. The transcript looked like it had been prepared in advance; they took a signature. On the basis of paragraph 58-3A I was sentenced to seven years of maximum regime prison camp followed by three years of resettlement, along with the confiscation of all my possessions. My crime was participation in an anti-Soviet conspiracy, since I had harbored one of its leaders, Karl Liidak.

From the tribunal I was taken back to Patarei prison, and a few days later taken on to the distribution prison at Lasnamäe. That trek was by night, on foot through Tallinn. I got a small strip of newspaper from a cellmate, scribbled a message on it about my trip to Siberia, rolled it up, and dropped it on the street. The tiny letter bore the address of my sister, who lived in Tallinn. (Of course, my sister knew that I was in the Patarei prison, and she had been able to send me a few packages.) The old lady who swept the streets delivered my letter, and so my sister still had time to bring me a few essential things I needed. In the Lasnamäe prison the echelon²⁶ was put together, and a few days later we were off.

It was the end of February. The weather was cold. We rode in cattle cars, about forty people in each. There were bunk beds for sleeping and sitting. Night and day we wore our outdoor clothing. Everyone in our car was Estonian except for one Russian girl, who was appointed to distribute the food. After nineteen days of travel, we arrived in the Saratov *oblast*²⁷ in the district of Pervomaïsk, in a small settlement from which Volga German families²⁸ had been deported before our arrival. There were about ten small buildings in the camp, surrounded by barbed wire. The area was flat and bare, covered by wormwood and weeds. There were no trees. The stoves were heated with *giisikud*—dried briquettes of mud and grass. On the horizon were other tiny clusters of houses surrounded by barbed wire. There were convicted common criminals as well as political prisoners in the camp. All of them were ill or invalids in some respect, and for this reason the prisoners did not go out to work outside the camp zone. When we got to the camp we were sent to the sauna and our clothes deloused. After the sauna we were shaved, the young man who did the shaving was

²⁶ Prison train.

²⁷ Soviet administrative territorial term, see Glossary.

²⁸ Volga Germans, see Glossary.

a Chinese prisoner. A few days later all the women were summoned for gynecological examination, and it turned out that the Russian girl who had distributed our food on the journey was syphilitic. Luckily all the Estonian women were healthy. I remember the names of some of my companions in camp: Eva Breden, Leena Lepp, Liisi Kingsepp, Hilja Simsel, Anni Lauk, and Vasar, the director of the Rakvere pharmacy, a married couple named Mikson, two men from south Estonia, Laansalu and Alango. While there I also got to know M. Gaskell, who had worked for seven years as the Soviet Union's ambassador in America. In camp I also met a young woman named Vera Andersson, an accomplice in the murder of Aino Tamm.²⁹ At the recommendation of two male friends, she began to study voice with Aino Tamm. She helped the murderers get into the apartment. However, the car carrying the stolen goods broke down, and the *militis* got its hands on the commemorative plaque given to her on her jubilee. The men got fifteen years, Vera ten years in prison. I also remember Jaan Siiman, who found a way to get himself a job in the office and started to smear his fellow prisoners with false accusations. As I was the brigadier in the camp laundry, and had my own little room, he started to harass me and persuade me to become an informer. He brought me prisoners' letters to look over. I was able to save several people from trouble. Because of him, many prisoners got extended sentences. About ten men (Dr. Sumberg, Dr. Kukemilk, the pharmacist Vasar, Laansalu, and others) were dragged before the war tribunal in Saratov, where they were given an additional ten years (Dr. Sumberg was accused of a plot to poison members of the Red Army).

Due to all of my physical and mental sufferings, my health got worse. There was an infirmary in our camp, the doctors were two Estonians, Dr. Sumberg and Dr. Kukemilk. Medical histories were written crosswise across old newspapers, or on small pieces of plywood that were later scraped clean with a piece of glass. There were no medical instruments whatsoever; light was provided by little bottles filled with oil, into which we stuck a small stick wrapped in cotton. Due to my worsening condition, I was transferred to the prisoners' central hospital in the city of Saratov, where living conditions were better. The staff was

²⁹ Aino Tamm (1864–1945) first professional Estonian singer. Born in the Tarvastu area, studied voice in Germany, France, and St. Petersburg. Began her singing career in 1891. Murdered in Tallinn in 1945.

made up of prisoners, only the hospital director and some nurses were free. Thanks to them I was given better rations, since they allowed me to do sewing and knitting, skills the Russian women did not have. Because of my “work service,” they might have kept me there until the end of my sentence, had it not been for Stalin’s directive demanding that common criminals and political prisoners be confined separately.

In February 1949 I was sent by convoy to the Taišet-Bratsk maximum security camp in the Krasnojarsk area. The trip in a cattle car in severe Siberian frost took 17 days. There was a longer stop in Omsk, and we were driven to the sauna, carload by carload. It was the usual ritual: a sliver of soap, two liters of water, delousing. The staff was all men. Then came the day when we were ordered out of the car, bundles and all. In the bitter cold we began the foot-march to our new “home.” The camp was huge; just before we arrived, the Chinese had been removed. The barracks were large, built for about 200–300 people. Double bunk beds, a miserable ragbag to sleep on. The regime was severe. We were awakened at 6 AM, regardless of the weather, and driven outdoors for a head count. At night a large barrel was brought in to serve as a latrine, and the doors were locked. The amount and nutritional value of the food depended entirely on the conscience of the camp directors. Our work was felling trees and building a road embankment.

In Siberia I also landed in the hospital once, where I worked for a little while in the sewing workshop. In the hospital there were very many Germans, Poles, Ukrainians, Hungarians, and Greeks. I will name some of them: among the Hungarians, József Kiliman and Géza von Pálffy, former president of the Hungarian National Bank, who died in 1952; of the Germans, the assistant director of the German airplane company Messerschmidt, and the private secretary of Wilhelm Pieck; there was even a professor of occult studies from Lhasa University, who compiled an accurate horoscope for many people there.

We were not given long to settle down in one camp. At night we would be ordered out with our bundles and marched through the cold and snow on to the next camp. There was no shortage of them—they were spaced two or three kilometers apart, all along the Taišet-Bratsk railroad.

In April, before the end of our sentence, those of us slated for release were sent to the distribution prison at Krasnojarsk. There we were forced to sign a document giving our “voluntary consent” to 25 years of “resettlement.” That prison was a real hell on earth, since we

were held together with common criminals, who were to be sent to the Arctic Sea as soon as the Jenissei River thawed. There were about 200 people in one large room. Some fit on the bunk beds, others underneath them. Those who landed under the beds were lucky, since they had a bit of shelter from the common criminals, who ruthlessly stole our better items of clothing and anything else they could lay their hands on. One really feared for one's life and health, since even the guards could not control them.

In May 1952, our group of discharged prisoners was first taken by truck about 100 kilometers north to the Dolgo-Mostovski district for resettlement. We landed in a settlement called Vesjolõi. Its population was composed of many different nationalities, all former prisoners. Many had families, who had come out to join them. It was a motley crowd—former newspaper reporters, teachers, cultural figures. Many were from Moscow. My brigadier was a former chemist, who for five years had studied the secrets of painting automobiles in an American Ford factory. People in the village were friendly and forthcoming, willing to help. We were housed in a large building resembling a barn, about 30 to a building. We slept on the floor, men on one side, women on the other. The next day everyone was given 200 roubles according to the old exchange rate, and assigned tracts of pine forest for resin extraction. Men were set to felling pine trees, women to gathering resin in units of 5000 pines. The resin was gathered into pails fastened to the trees and collected with small funnels; after it was cleaned of rubbish, it was poured into vats. The quotas were large, but the harvest of resin depended on the weather. Mosquitoes were a constant torture. A horsehair flap always had to be in front of one's face. Since the village was seven to eight kilometers from my assigned tract, I lived for one summer in the Siberian taiga in a mud hut.³⁰ Only on my days off could I go back to the village to get food (cooking oil, barley, bread). The natural environment was beautiful and the climate was good. In the winter, women were exempted from forest work, but stayed at home preparing small sticks and spouts to fasten to the pine trees. Men went to the woods on broad snow-skis to prepare the pines. The snow was deep—from September to May there was not a single thaw. The first year was very hard, and my wages were barely enough to cover food.

³⁰ Mud hut or *semļjanka*.

During the second summer I no longer had to go to the forest—because of my poor health I was assigned to cleaning the office instead. In exchange for the clothing my sister sent from Estonia I was able to buy myself a heifer, who soon became a cow. Now my food worries were over, and I was even able to sell some milk. In one day the men put up a cowshed. They felled some pines in the nearby forest, cut logs three meters long, notched the ends, numbered them, carried them into the yard and assembled them. The ceiling was also of logs, and in the fall I lugged all the hay I had been able to gather in the forest and hoisted it up there. From a poor *kolkhoz*³¹ about ten kilometers away I brought myself a sorry little pig, carrying it in my arms the whole way, the first one in that village. By the fall I had 100 kilos of meat. I divided the meat up into proper portions and hung it up frozen in cloth bags on the wall of the shed. In the same way I made up a winter milk supply: in a liter-sized bowl, I froze the milk into disks and hung it up. Then I had a chance to get myself forty chicks from the district (*raion*) center.³² Every day one could get a small loaf of bread, so why not get busy? The soil was fertile: from one bucketful planted in a plot of fallow land, I got 58 buckets of potatoes; vegetables also grew well. So I no longer had a shortage of food.

Some Estonians lived in the district centre: art historian Villem Raam; the pastor of the Nõo village church; and a lawyer from Viljandi. Their work was making bricks: clay packed into a box, smoothed on top, then turned over and baked in an oven.

The days wore on slowly. It was a good thing that one could keep in touch with people in the homeland. Thanks to Stalin's "mercy" the three years of my resettlement sentence had been commuted to five. Little by little (after Stalin's death) people began to be set free, and I began to hope. The news of my release came at the end of 1956, and I got home in February 1957. It is impossible to understand my feeling on crossing the border from the direction of Pskov, when the voices of Kalmer Tennosaar and Viktor Gurjev greeted us over the radio, singing an Estonian song. In happy tears I wanted to kiss the soil of my homeland.

As I call to mind everything I have lived through, it is incomprehensible how I got through those twelve years of hell. What helped me

³¹ *Kolkhoz* or collective farm, see Glossary.

³² *Raion* or district, see glossary for Russian administrative organization.

was my optimistic temperament, and fantastic dreams that predicted the future, all of which came true.

Since then I have been living with my sister in Tallinn. Because of my health problems I did not go to work. I have been a pensioner since 1960. In 1965 I had an acute appendicitis, and an emergency operation performed by Dr. Braun in the Nõmme clinic saved my life. Since then I have felt better, except for those complaints that come with age. In the 1980s I worked for seven years as a guard in the Adamson-Eric museum. That was a pleasant time.

In summary, I can say that difficult times and hardships teach one to appreciate life and people from a much broader perspective; one's own small-minded assumptions are transformed. In my life I have met very many different kinds of people. All of them have added something to my inner world. Book learning is certainly a value, but shared life wisdom is of greater worth in shaping the personality.

Hilja Lill died on 4 July 1997 in Tallinn.



Tuuli Jaik

BORN 1910

My parents were country children from south Estonia. My mother was born in 1864 near Otepää, my father in 1861 in Sangaste. Both were the children of manor servants.¹ Since they were the children of poor parents, both of them had hard lives, and as small children they had to work in the summer as herders. As they grew older they helped their parents with household work. Later, when she was

20, my mother had the good fortune to get work as a kitchen hand at the Vidrike estate.

Fate brought my parents together, and they married in 1892. Mother was 28 years old at the time, father 31. Because of the hard economic circumstances in the country, they were forced to move, and they chose Tartu for their new home. There were better prospects for finding work in town, and father became a bricklayer. Later he began keeping a stall at the market.

A first son was born to my mother in 1893. Because of the child she could no longer go out to work, but she earned extra money at home by washing clothes for the gentlefolk.² Little by little my parents began to settle themselves in a rented apartment. A year and a half later a second child was born—a daughter. They did not stop there—every year or two a new child was born into the family, five sons in all. After that, children began dying, first a little daughter, then two tiny sons. The cause of death was catching cold. Mother would help Father

¹ Manor servants—worked on the local Baltic German seigneurial estate.

² *Saksad*, German folks. This is somewhat euphemistic. What is meant is Baltic German middle class city dwellers.

out at the market, and while she was away, the older children took the younger ones outside, and did not dress them for cold weather. Yet even when she was 45, Mother gave birth to a stillborn daughter.

A gypsy woman had told my mother: "You will have one more daughter!" And that was what happened. I was born on the 6th of May 1910 according to the old calendar, on a flag-draped state holiday, sharing a birthday with Tsar Nicholas II. So four children remained to my parents—three older sons and me, the apple of their eye.

When I was born, my mother was 46 years old, my oldest brother 17. He even scolded my mother, as I was the eighth child already.

In those days a large number of city folks lived in crowded conditions. A single room and kitchen on one end had to fit five or six poor people. In the room there were usually two beds, a wardrobe in front of one, and a cloth curtain in front of the other one. There were also a table, a few benches or chairs, and a chest of drawers for clothing. On the wall was a coat rack. One corner of the room was used as a kitchen. There was a large stove there, in the hollow of which was a small cooking range for preparing food. Water had to be brought from a well, and dirty water was taken out to the refuse hole. There was an outhouse in the yard. A chimneyless petroleum lamp or an oil lamp, called a "snot-nose" (*tattnina*) gave light when it was dark. This was just the kind of apartment we lived in during my early childhood.

As my brothers grew up, they began to leave home. We had an auntie in St. Petersburg; she was a kitchen hand for wealthy folks there. One after the other the boys went to live with their aunt in Petersburg. She supported them and gave advice as to what to do next. All of my brothers became factory workers and lived on their own.

Then came the year 1914. This was the end of peaceful living, for the First World War began. My two oldest brothers were mobilized into the Tsar's army; the youngest was left alone to work in a foreign city. Just before the boys left home, my father stopped working as a bricklayer in Tartu and started keeping a corner store, located at the corner of Kesk and Lootuse Street. We had three rented rooms there: a shop-room, a living room, and a bread room. It was called the bread room because of the large baking oven that took up over half the space; there rye and white bread were baked to sell in the store. The top of the stove was broad and flat, and since it was heated almost every day, it was always hot. A very comfortable place to sleep at night, especially in the winter.

The store sold everything edible, but mainly dark and white bread. On the floor there were two barrels, one for Atlantic herring, and the other for the smaller Baltic herring.³ Next to them was a vat of petroleum. There were other small things: lamp glasses, thread, needles, buttons, and what not.

The streets were lit with lanterns. At night, a man with a ladder came along the street, lighting the lanterns one by one, which cast a dim glow over the street. Inside the lanterns there were petroleum lamps.

One night I had a mishap. I dropped the lampglass on the floor, and it shattered, of course. Father was in the room saw what happened and snapped angrily, "Bring me the switch at once!" Frightened, I thought to myself that now I would have to go out in the dark and find an old sauna switch or broom. I was more afraid of darkness and ghosts than I was of a beating. In a fit of courage, I slipped into the dark room and hid under the bed. Father chuckled at my extraordinary bravery. That time I went without a whipping.

A year and a half later Father found a new place for the shop on Tähe Street, across from Katariina Street, later named Koidu Street. We moved into a large, pretty, wooden house. Our living quarters were in the basement, which had been furnished as a shop room. There, too, there was a large bread oven.

Shortly after the great Russian Revolution⁴ came, which disrupted our lives once again. The stores were bare of merchandise. My parents' store had no goods to sell either. A general time of hardship and misery began, and they had to close their business. We moved into a new apartment on Kuu Street, where we had two rooms. There, too, we had to carry clean water in and dirty water out. The only thing I liked about the new apartment was that the toilet was in the hallway and not out in the yard.

After the revolution my brothers and our good auntie came home from Russia, since there was even more famine and misery there. My aunt found work as a kitchen maid in Tartu and at Karula manor. My middle brother came back from the war, ill with a serious case of tuberculosis. He was barely 24 years old when he died in February 1920.

³ *Silk* in Estonian, also known as Baltic herring.

⁴ Russian Revolution, 1917–1918. See also fn 4 of previous story, and Glossary.

While we were still living on Tähre Street, I turned seven, and it was time to go to school. I was enrolled in Miss Saalomon's renowned private school. Miss Saalomon was an old maid. She demanded that the children respect her. We had to curtsy to her as we walked by, and when speaking with her, we first had to kiss her hand. The school had six grades. I entered the first grade, and immediately had to begin learning German and Russian. I only attended that school until Christmas, when the war came to our door and all the schools were closed.

In 1919, when we were already living on Kuu Street, Mother used her last bit of flour to bake a *kringel*.⁵ It was very nice, but it was not for us; it was taken to a stranger as a birthday gift. My sick brother and I looked on sadly, our mouths watering, as Mother got ready to take the *kringel* away. The birthday child was a distant relative of ours, whose father worked as an orderly in the wound clinic on Toome Hill. They had a small apartment in the basement of the clinic, and got their firewood for free from the hospital. We had no firewood at all, and no money to buy any. So every day Mother had to carry firewood in a basket from the hospital on Toome Hill all the way to our house on Kuu Street. The way was long and hard. The *kringel* Mother took them was in return for that firewood.

Soon after that *kringel* my brother died. My mother wept bitterly, remembering that her own children went without *kringel*.

In 1919 I went to school again. By this time we were living in the Estonian Republic, and Estonian-language schools were being founded. My new school was located at the corner of Riia and Kalevi (Karlola) street, and the name of the school was Tartu Ladies Gymnasium. The school uniform cap was dark blue, quite similar to the teamster's caps of that time. Soon people started referring to the school as the "women's house," but this was an insult to the school's honor. A new director came, and the school was renamed Tartu Girls Gymnasium. Now the uniform cap was round, made of black velvet with a blue rim and a thin white stripe, with the symbol TTG on the side.

In high school I had to repeat a grade twice. German and English were difficult for me. One mark of 2 was enough to require repeating a grade. Since I was already older, and my older brother had to support both me and my mother, it became hard for him to provide for both of

⁵ Sweet birthday bread in the shape of a pretzel, flavored with saffron and cardamom, similar to a *stollen* in taste.

us, and I stopped going to school. I was able to complete four years of high school, but the last year was interrupted.

My father died in 1927, when I was just 17 years old. I had to find a job. It was the time of the economic crisis, and since I had not learned a trade, jobs were nowhere to be found. Because of the crisis there were plenty of unemployed people even before I counted myself in. My youngest brother got married and left home. My older brother had studied to be a railway mechanic in Petersburg, and found himself a job in Tallinn. My mother and I were left by ourselves. Mother was already old, and she had no job or other source of income. In those days there were no pensions.

It was August 1931. I was 21 years old. I read in the paper that the merchant Konstantin Jaik needed salespeople for his shop at 11 Suurturg Street in Tartu. Konstantin Jaik was an acquaintance of my parents, and even my honorary godfather. He had come to town from the country as a poor man, but he had a good head for business and good luck; thus he made good progress. Soon he established his own shop in Tartu and got wealthier by the day. He had a large business, three houses on Jaama street, and a bookbindery with five employees. He also had a farm at Kodijärve, and finally even bought himself a truck. So Mother went to Jaik to talk about me, and he called me to work the very next day. I was glad to go, and so I became a shop girl in Jaik's business, where I worked for more than 10 years.

Since this was a first-class business, the owner was able to sell all sorts of merchandise. There were usually five or six salesclerks. During school holidays Jaik's two oldest sons would come to work in the business, also as salesclerks. Jaik's two youngest daughters were more interested in rural life, and spent their summers at the farm.

When there were few customers in the shop, there were all sorts of other jobs for the salesclerks. We never stood idly behind the counter. Jaik had several kinds of illustrated children's books printed, and he was also the first in Estonia to print picture postcards. Foreign postcards had heavy import duties, so domestic postcards were much cheaper, as well as bringing in more of a profit. The printed cards were brought to the shop, and the salespeople had to sort and package them slowly. Jaik paid his workers relatively good wages, and had free meals brought in for his employees every midday.

My Tallinn brother remained a bachelor for a long time. In 1931, we got a letter from him announcing his marriage, and inviting me, my

brother and sister-in-law to the wedding. I had never been to Tallinn before, and now there were two reasons for going there. While there I became acquainted with a certain bachelor, a friend of my brother's.

That gentleman took an interest in me and when leaving the wedding party proposed that we begin writing to each other. In his letter he indicated that he wanted to marry me, and had spoken to my brother about his intentions. Me get married? I still felt like an underage child, though I was already 21 years old.

Soon I became acquainted with another bachelor in Tartu, who had a small iron factory and his own little house. My admirer started to call on me. I had a nice blonde friend in the house next door. When my new admirer would come, this blonde angel would just happen to be stopping by. Like a guardian angel, she never left me alone with my admirer.

Now I was stuck with two visitors, but conversation was slow to start. My gentleman caller invited us both to go to the movies. My friend and I were happy to go to the movies for free, for we seldom had enough money left over. We were treated to box seats, the most expensive ones in the house. August—that was the admirer's name, took a tablet of "President" chocolate from his pocket and handed it to us. "President" was the most expensive kind of chocolate in those days.

At some point August was told that my mother and I were both fond of music, but that we were not able to provide ourselves with such a luxury as a gramophone. What a miracle—August brought his own expensive gramophone for us to use, along with a number of records. He said we should listen to the records as much as our hearts desired. That pleasure lasted for quite awhile. Then August came once again, and asked me out. I even gave my word, but thought to myself that I did not really want that bachelor for myself, and when I brought the blonde along this time, August took his gramophone and records and that was the end of it.

In 1934 Mother fell ill. She was paralyzed on her right side. As a working person it was impossible for me stay home to take care of her. I took Mother to stay with my younger brother, who was working as a house painter. My sister-in-law was a custodian in a house in the center of town, very close to their apartment. My ill mother was left under her care. Every day when I came from work, I would stop by to see her. My own lodgings were on Lossi Street, quite close to where my brother lived.

Then I became acquainted with a regular customer at Jaik's shop, who worked at the Lombi photography shop and bought photographic materials from us. At Jaik's store I was in charge of wholesale, and I worked at the last counter at the end of the long narrow shop room. Since the photo materials were in my department, Evald, the new admirer, had to walk past all the other salespeople when he came to the shop. Every time he came a bit shyly, with a frightened look on his face.

Once Evald came to buy wallpaper for his room. He bought the wallpaper and left. The next time he came, I asked him how his room looked. Evald answered, "Oh, the room is wonderful, if you don't believe me, come and see for yourself!"

When I stepped into Evald's room, I was surprised, for the room was tastefully furnished: ceramic vases on the sofa table and the bookshelf, even a rug on the floor. Since Evald was a principled teetotaler and nonsmoker, and since he planned to open his own photography shop in the future, I decided to start spending my free time with him.

My meetings with Evald lasted three and a half years. We even made plans to get married. Nothing came of them, since we were both short on money. Evald was willing to get married, but I did not agree at first: a bride had to have proper clothing, and we wished to hold a small wedding party. We also had to have expensive wedding rings. We planned to save up our money for these. Evald had bought an expensive camera, which he had only partly paid off, my wages went to living expenses: rent, clothing, payments toward some pieces of furniture and a radio. So the time dragged on.

Then came the events of 1940 and the communists,⁶ and all of our plans got disrupted. Although the events did not touch us directly, my boss lost all of his property and was taken away. Both Evald and I were worried. Many of our acquaintances had been arrested. I was not fond of the new bosses who had come in after the business was nationalized. The communists had even proposed that I become a boss, but I categorically refused. Under the communists I continued to work as a salesgirl; we often had to carry out tiresome inventories, for days and nights at a time. The coming of the Germans and liberation from the communists was a blessing to us.

⁶ Events of June 1940 refer to the Soviet takeover and military occupation of Estonia.

When the German regime came in 1941, people got their radios back, which had been confiscated by the communists. I took my radio to my brother's place and, waited for Evald to return. My blonde friend also happened to be there.

As we sat there waiting for Evald, my blonde friend and my sister-in-law began setting me straight on Evald: he had no intention of marrying me, since he was seeing other girls as well. They advised me to ditch Evald and take up with a German soldier. With that convincing advice in mind, I thought, let Evald come, I will trip him up with my questions.

That was on Monday. On Tuesday, Evald was not waiting for me at the shop door. On Wednesday I was at work as usual. All of a sudden the son of my former boss, also named Konstantin Jaik, stepped into the shop. He bought a few things from his father's nationalized store, and started to talk to me, since he recognized me as one of his father's longtime employees and acquaintances. He told me he had volunteered for the German army, and had been made a *Zahlmeister* there, that he had been given an officer's rank, that he distributed *margitender*⁷ to soldiers and regiments. He added that his monthly wage was 1000 marks, and that if he got married, he would get an additional 1000 marks a month.

In the course of that conversation Konstantin Jaik, whom they called "Konta," asked me whether I was going to marry the boy I was going out with (Evald). I said we had had a fight a few days before, and that I did not know what was going to happen. Konta was divorced from his first wife, and thus a free man; as a soldier he could marry at a moment's notice. Konta made me a totally unexpected offer, that I go with him the next day to register our marriage. The whole discussion took place right there and then across the shop counter, during a brief conversation between a salesgirl and an ordinary customer. The two of us had never had a deep conversation, and had not even seen one another for months. Earlier I had known him as my boss's son; he knew me as a salesgirl in his father's shop.

I was surprised by Konta's story and by his proposal and thought it was all some kind of joke. He explained to me that he meant it very seriously. Since I continued to think it was a joke, I answered, teasingly: "I'm not joking either—I am willing!" This was two days after the

⁷ *Margitender*: provisions, including allotments of liquor.

trouble with Evald. On the spot Konta proposed that we go and register our marriage that Saturday. In the meantime I was to submit an application indicating my wish to marry. I thought that since Fate had directed my path in this way, I might as well play a prank on Evald. For a week now there had been no sign of him at our shop door; before he had shown up every day. So Konta and I went and registered our marriage that Saturday. Konta was over a year younger than me, thirty at the time.

In 1939 I had changed my name. Earlier it had been Antonie Martinson, but then I chose the name Tuuli Mardimäe⁸; with my marriage on 4 October 1941 I now became Tuuli Jaik. Our marriage was witnessed by my brother and by a fellow soldier on Konta's side. The registration took place during working hours; we had each asked for an hour's time off from work. I put on my best dress, but it was miserable and totally unsuitable for such an important occasion. We had no rings at all. After the registration Konta and I each hurried back to work.

That same evening Konta invited me to visit his home on Filosoofi Street, where he lived with his mother. I had never been there before, but I was now legally Konta's wife and had to obey him. What a surprise—it was only then that Konta announced to his mother that today was his new wedding day, and that I was his new bride. Konta's mother had no way of foreseeing this and was frightened. After all I was only a shopgirl; his first wife had had a university education. Konta himself had attended university and studied economics. Konta's mother took a pork roast and sauerkraut out of the oven; that was what she “happened to have.” And our wedding party could begin. Konta had a few more friends visiting, who brought some drinks. The party ended late. Konta and his friends were left sitting at the table, while I went home alone through the darkened city, where not a single lantern had been lit.

After my marriage I remained in my one-room apartment on Jaama Street with my aunt. Konta never moved in there, mainly because I was not living alone, but also because the apartment was not in order—the broken windows had not been boarded up.

On my wedding night I slept in my own home, Konta in his. Later Konta started keeping me with him at night. As a new bride I had to fulfill my marital obligations.

⁸ See Estification of names, Glossary.

We were married in October 1941, and already at the beginning of the following February Konta was posted to Russia, first to Pskov, then somewhere further away. In 1944 he was posted somewhere on the western front.

Even before my marriage I had been living as a tenant in one of Konta's father's houses. Even though I did not visit my husband every night, I got pregnant just the same. My son was born on 7 September 1942, Konta's birthday. So Konta got a son as a birthday present.

The partially bombed out house on Jaama Street where I was living was fixed up by Christmas 1941. Auntie and I moved to a three-room apartment on the second floor, where I am still living today. Some of the rooms were half empty, since I did not have enough furniture to fill them. But the three room apartment had a separate kitchen, a sink for dirty water (clean water still had to be drawn from a well with a bucket), and an indoor toilet.

With these changes, Konta began spending nights at my place. He did not like the half-empty rooms, though, and it was more comfortable to live at his mother's place. After he was sent to the front, he only came to town very seldom. But whenever he had leave and came to Tartu he would visit me and our son, and even in those hard times he always brought provisions. It was Konta's wish that the boy also have the name Konstantin. That name would then have been in the Jaik family for three generations. But since the boy weighed 4 kg at birth and had curly hair, I imagined that my son would grow up to be a strong son of Kalev.⁹ And so the boy got the name I chose for him, Kalev.

Then came the summer of 1944 and the Germans began their hasty retreat from Estonia. My husband was still in the army, and there was no news from him. When the fighting finally reached Tartu, and everyone was forced to evacuate, my aunt and I and the child went to Maarja-Magdaleena 20 kilometers away.

By the beginning of September the Russians had taken Tartu and some of the refugees started to return to the city. From far off one could see that all that was left of Jaik's largest and most beautiful house were two tall chimneys and a sunken tin roof.

Already in the first week after returning to town I landed a job as a building supervisor. Here's the story. Purely by chance I ran into a

⁹ Estonian mythical hero, father of the protagonist of the Estonian national epic, *Kalevipoeg*. See Glossary.

man named Meos who was now a big communist official; today he has some more important job somewhere. He was walking around with a triumphant expression on his face; to his mind we had finally gotten rid of the fascist cutthroats, now there would be real freedom and the right kind of life for working people. As proof of his communism he wore a red carnation, and he went on and on explaining how communism would spread throughout the world, even to America, where they were already giving all kinds of aid to the communists. It would be all over for fascist Germany very soon. They would bring enough food for everybody from America, and even build new bridges across the River Emajõgi. This man suggested that since I was a person with some education, I could begin working immediately as a building supervisor. Such people were badly needed. And so it went.

Besides organizing maintenance work for nationalized houses, the work of a building supervisor in those days consisted mainly of distributing apartments. Abandoned apartments had to be put on a list, inventories carried out of the household goods left behind; then we had to wait for people to return home, and meanwhile prevent squatters from taking over or looting apartments without occupants. It would often happen that people who had evacuated and fled from the advancing front returned home (sometimes from as far away as Haapsalu), only to find their apartments already occupied. There were many such troubles, and as a building supervisor I had to put up with all kind of vulgar swearing in Estonian and Russian. We had many dealings with folks who had come here from Russia and thought they had first dibs on everything. I did not know any Russian, but whenever I tried to speak German with them, I was called a fascist.

My work as a building supervisor only lasted a few weeks. The cadres department demanded my *anketa* sheet,¹⁰ which had to contain a complete personal biography. When it became clear that I was the wife of the big business owner Jaik's son, and that my husband was in the German army, I was fired on the spot.

¹⁰ *Anketa*, form that had to be filled out prior to employment or application to institutions of higher learning. A crucial feature of which was one's political biography (including family data, such as whether any relatives had fought in the German Army, been Forest Brothers, or were living abroad). See also Glossary.

From then on I made many efforts to find a new job, first as a salesperson, since that was the trade I had learned. Many places were willing to hire me. However, as soon as I submitted my documents, and they found out that my name was Jaik, the offer was cancelled. Everyone knew the former merchant Jaik. Then they would ask me, you wouldn't happen to be related to that merchant Jaik, would you? As soon as I explained why my name was Jaik, it was all over and I was shown the door.

Since I could not find work anywhere, we had to live in the most horrendous poverty and misery—I, my old auntie, and my child. Both I and my old auntie developed anemia due to constant malnutrition; we kept the best food for the child. To avoid complete starvation, I began to sell any clothes and things I had left at the flea market. The larger room of my three-room apartment was taken away, and I filled the remaining two rooms up with tenants. These were people from the country, and through them we got a bit of barley and firewood to alleviate our greatest need. Because the tenants took up all the beds, my auntie had to sleep on the floor. Soon I ran out of things to sell for bread; my auntie's wristwatch was apparently stolen by the tenants. In order to avoid total starvation, I had to start dealing in deficit goods at the flea market, or, as it was called in those days—speculating. That was the last remaining source of income, which allowed someone in rags and with a half-empty belly to keep body and soul together.

Little by little I began to buy up things at the flea market, and then I would go and sell them at the Elva market. At best I would earn enough to pay for the train ticket, and have a few kopecks left over. Since my sister-in-law lived in Tallinn, I started bringing goods from Tallinn in a bundle. In those days you could not buy things like matches and candles anywhere, over the counter, that is. But my sister-in-law knew of a place in Tallinn where, with connections, you could buy matches under the table. So with the matches and with Christmas candles I went to the Elva market—this was rare stuff and it sold well.

The trip from Tartu to Tallinn was a difficult undertaking in those days, and often impossible, since the Tartu railway station was full of "bag boys"¹¹; the train was, too. The bag boys would stop at nothing: they rode on the roofs of railway cars and clung to the steps. One could

¹¹ Bag boys (*kotipoisid*)—men and underage boys who came from Russia by train to Estonia in search of scarce consumer goods to speculate with.

be lucky enough to get aboard the Tallinn train only by taking the train to Elva, and then somehow to crowd one's way onto the Tallinn train with the bag boys. Once I had to go to Tallinn and back that way three times in one week.

We lived in this kind of misery for over three years, until 1947. Then my auntie, with whom I had lived this whole time and who had taken care of my child, fell sick. I was lucky to find her a place in an old folks' home. I hoped that she would get more to eat there than with me.

Later I was able to get a very unusual job for myself in Tartu, and I stopped trading at the market. No one hired me officially to sell newspapers, because of the name Jaik and my dubious background, but I began helping my cousin out, who was officially a newspaper seller. By selling newspapers as a twosome she had a large turnover, which meant higher wages and a bonus. She paid me in return for my help. This miserable life, where I could not even work under my own name, lasted for several years. I landed my first legal job in 1950, and even that was temporary. For awhile, I was an assistant worker on a construction site, but I was soon fired. It was very hard to find jobs then, especially in the wintertime.

Around 1951 I ran into an acquaintance on the street, who worked in a workshop for the handicapped. It was easier to get work there, but an invalid's certificate was required. I was sent to the doctor for an examination. The doctors found that I was anemic, apparently from chronic malnutrition. I was assigned to Category II, and was hired. A normal job at last, a legal one at that, with wages. For seven years I had struggled along without one. I worked in the market building as a salesperson in a small shop. The invalids' workshop had their own sausage factory and bakery. I sold their products as well as a range of other foodstuffs there. I earned an average wage, and as a result my table and health improved considerably. Unfortunately the invalids' guild was soon dissolved, and I was let go along with the others.

After Stalin's death¹² things improved somewhat. People got hired more easily and without the long personal biography. I got a job as a salesgirl, at first in a kiosk, later in the shop on Kivi Street.

Soon I found a new job as a night watchman, and after that worked in the Sangar sewing factory, doing all kinds of jobs; the last one was ironing denim trousers. This was demanding piecework, but

¹² Stalin's death, 5 March 1953.

the wages were higher than I had ever earned before. Poverty and misery were long since over. I retired from the sewing factory in 1965 at 55 years of age and began drawing a fairly large pension—52 roubles a month. Even as a factory worker I had enough money both to live on and to save in the bank.

After I retired, several private gardeners asked me to sell their produce and flowers at the market, in return for 10% of the earnings. So I went to the Tartu, Tallinn, and Leningrad markets to sell flowers and to earn a pension supplement. Sometimes there were weeks after weeks of flower selling from the early morning until late at night with no breaks and no days off. The work was in cold, unheated market buildings, sometimes in the open air in the wind and rain, with scarcely a moment all day long to eat normally or to stretch your legs. Often I would think to myself, I will sell this one lot and then go home to rest. But there were more and more of those who had flowers and needed help, until finally the job became an endless year-round affair, where there was no more time for rest and no sick days. The flower selling went on for another 25 years. My earnings from flower-selling were on the average 200 to 250 roubles a month, which was equivalent to a good industrial worker's salary. In addition to that I was a pensioner and had 52 roubles a month of pension.

Most of my substantial income I set aside in a bank account. My son, who also worked in industry, put his whole salary aside in savings. I was saving money to buy a house; ever since childhood I had wished for a house of my own.

Once in 1983 I chose an average stone house on Jaama street, and was firmly intending to buy it. The price was 25,000 roubles, and I had more money than that. In my mind I was already the owner of that house. I told my son Kalev about my plan. He was very disappointed in my plan to buy a house. He answered me definitively, "If you waste your money on buying that house, do what you want with it, I will not move there and help you!" The house was on a street corner, and there was a fair stretch of street to sweep. There was quite a bit of pedestrian traffic, and in the winter especially there would be snow to shovel and sand to scatter. My son stuck firm to his words, and I was too old to take care of the house by myself. I went and took back the deposit, did not buy the house, and left the money sitting in my bank account.

Then came inflation and the currency reform. Of our huge sum of savings the currency reform left us with a mere 10,000 kroons, a paltry sum indeed.

Life at the beginning of the Soviet era had been very hard. But the situation improved over time, unemployment diminished, and wages gradually increased. For anyone who was the least bit thrifty, it was easy to save money after everyday living expenses were met, especially in the last decades. Food was very cheap, relative to the wages; necessities and building supplies were also. What was more, people were given up to 600 square meter pieces of property to build on at no expense.¹³ The only problem was that not everyone who wanted could get it. That was also why private homes were sold for such a high price; it would have been several times cheaper to build oneself. No one would have granted me and my son a plot of land to build on; not counting us there were 700 people in line and finally they would no longer even accept applications. The last time my son went to apply for a building plot was in 1980, but he did not have a family, and they would not even let him submit an application. So we did not get our house after all, and never got anything at all for our big pile of money. My son did not even get himself a wife.

My husband's—Kalev's father's—sister Heljo fled during the war to Germany, and went from there to America. I have been corresponding with her since 1958. Heljo wrote to me that Konta was also living in America, that he had met a woman there and had gotten married. That woman also had a little son, whom Konta had adopted. But Konta himself did not bother to send us a single letter or message from that distant land. Apparently he was happy there with his new wife. Since 1944, when Kalev was almost 2 years old, I had not received a single bit of news from my husband. His sister wrote that Konta had died in America in 1986.

Then Kalev and I inherited a share in our former apartment. The building had been nationalized in 1940, and only now was it returned to its heirs. Thus over 50 years later we even got a small inheritance from Konta, though because of this we lost most of our own EVP papers,¹⁴ since we ourselves could not apply them toward purchasing

¹³ See also the life story of Jutta Pihlamägi, this volume.

¹⁴ EVP papers (privatization bonds) were issued in the 1990s according to the

an apartment or anything else. With the EVP papers we could have bought a nice large apartment and we would even have had working years left over. But now we got half an apartment for an inheritance in a miserable building that was falling apart. For our EVP papers Kalev bought some shares in stock, which in essence is nothing but worthless slips of paper, in other words a bad deal. If Kalev had sold those shares, then at best he would have gotten 2000 crowns back. You cannot buy an apartment for that kind of money. Again, compared to all the others, we have been seriously cheated.

While I was writing my life story I was stricken with a sudden ailment of the foot. Up till now my health has held up pretty well, though I had many chronic problems. Somehow my foot had gotten injured, and the doctor said there was a “rose” on it.¹⁵ Among my family, I have now lived to the most advanced age, all the others have long since died. If only I could get over this foot trouble! Though I will soon turn 87, I wish very much to see how my son turns out, left as he is, so alone in the world.

number of years one had worked, as well as for nationalized property. Using these, it was possible to privatize an apartment or a piece of land. One could also trade (speculate) with these certificates. Prices for EVP papers continued to rise, up to tenfold, until they were abolished in the year 2000.

¹⁵ Euphemism for infection.



Elmar-Raimund Ruben

BORN 1918

“The others were out in the potato field when I realized that today was the day.” That is how Mother talked about my coming into the world. Father drove straight from that potato field to town to get the midwife. I was put to my mother’s breast at ten o’clock that evening. It was the 30th of October 1918.

My father chose my name from a list he and my mother had jotted in the margin of a newspaper. My mother liked Raimund, and my father Elmar. There was

no argument. The boy was named Elmar-Raimund. Life in that quiet farm in the woods, out of the way of the village, took its peaceful, ordinary course. My parents worked hard and raised the boy they hoped would be the future farm owner. But then...

Bands of Red Army men forced their way across the Narva River. The Estonian War of Independence began.¹ Three women were left at home: my mother, my aunt, and my grandmother. I was the only male in the house. Very soon the Soviets had taken control of the area.² Rumors about their brutal deeds spread even before they arrived. The township’s courier served my mother orders to appear before a tribunal at the Vasta estate. I was a month and a half old at the time. Mother packed me up and got on her way. A large group of frightened people

¹ Estonian War of Independence, 1918–1920, see Glossary.

² The period of Bolshevik power in Estonia, under the Estonian Military Revolutionary Committee, lasted from 27 October 1917 to the beginning of the German occupation on 25 February 1918. See Glossary (Russian Revolution).

was standing in the yard of the Vasta estate. The armed guard on the steps was calling out names. Our turn came. In a large room three people were sitting at a table. My mother knew one of them, Anna Leetsman. They had chatted and danced at the same parties. Now they were strangers to one another. "Where is your husband?" was the first question. Of course, my mother had no idea. Then she was taunted: "What kind of woman are you if you don't know where your husband is?" I was told that after questioning my mother, the middle-aged interrogator turned to me and asked, "Where is your father?" Of course, I had no way of knowing, let alone responding. My mother said the look in the man's eyes had been so hostile that she had put up her hand to shield me: Such hatred was not a good thing for a child to see. Then the tribunal motioned to the gunman standing behind them, and he accompanied us into the next room, which was also full of frightened people. Every now and then the gunman would call people out of the room again. After an hour or two, our turn came, and again we had to face the tribunal. We were finally allowed to go back home, with strict orders not to leave. So I really have something to boast about: I already had to face a tribunal at the age of one-and-a-half months. It was not to be the last time.

Late one night toward the end of that year someone pounded loudly on the door and shouted in a foreign language, demanding to be let in. When the frightened women opened the door, gunmen marched in, their bayonets pointed at us. They shoved their way into the hallway, from there into the kitchen, from the kitchen into the back room, then the front room, and back into the hall again. Just to make sure they made another round. Then they sat down in the front room and demanded something to eat. Only after they had put the food in front of them did the women dare to ask whether they could close the door to the hallway. The intruders kindly gave permission. When they were pounding on the door, my mother had been bathing me near the warm bread oven. Cold winter air blew in through the doors they had left open, and I got pneumonia.

Time passed. Father came back from the War of Independence healthy and unharmed, with three stars on his collar. The farm that the women had tried to keep up was in disarray; the fields had gone to seed. One horse had already been sent to war; the neighbor had driven the other one to death with too heavy a load of potatoes. The beehives had been looted by thieves. But there was even more trouble

ahead when Father came home from war: he was elected township elder. Taking care of township affairs took time, and he had less and less time to work in his own fields. Often I would see tears in my mother's eyes. Father himself became gloomy and taciturn. Then Grandmother was laid to rest in the graveyard beside her husband Juhan. My aunt could not hold out, either, and left us to live in town. Mother's heart almost gave out on her. Father sold some of the live-stock that was left to cover some debts and rented out the farm. We went to live in Rakvere.

Father could not find work in town. The tenant could not meet his rent obligations, either in cash or farm produce. Father was in despair and blamed himself. Mother's face was even more tear-stained than before. Once I heard her sobbing openly. I was frightened. At the time I did not understand that this time they were tears of joy. Father had just told her that he had cancelled the rental contract. We had lived in town for a year and a half, but now we were going back to our broken down home in the country. The tenant had even hauled all the manure out of our stable and gone back to his own land. There were only two people to do the farm work, Father and Mother, with her ailing heart. I was only seven years old.

Then it was time for me to go to school. We went off together, Father holding my hand in one hand, my school bag in the other. I did not have any trouble with my studies at the Vasta and Unukse elementary schools. I was among the better students. I took up sports (track and field), and I started smoking. After three years of "experimenting" I quit the smoking, since I wanted to become an athlete.

After I finished elementary school the question was what would come next. Father had been smart in his day, and his father had sent him to the Pikaristi parish school. It was not possible to give an only son more education than that. He was to become the farm owner. And that is how it went for him. Father wanted me to continue his interrupted education, and so he sent me to high school in Rakvere. In my first two years at Rakvere Central High School my studies went well, but later on it got harder. I was also quite involved in athletics, and several times the school champion in track and field and basketball. On my diploma I was recognized as the school's best athlete. For many years I was active as troop leader in the Rakvere Scout Association, and successfully completed the first advanced leadership course held by the Estonian Boy Scout Association.

After high school graduation there was required military service. Father and Mother were left to do the farm work alone. When I left I told Father: "Don't worry—I'll be back fifteen months from now, and then we'll see what we can do here!" At that time, in October 1938, neither I nor my father had any way of knowing that instead of 15 months I would serve 18 years without a break, and that I would never return to plow the fields at home.

I served in the navy, at first in the naval fortress on the island of Aegna; from there I was sent to the Tondi Military Academy to the officer's training course. After graduating from the military academy I should have done my leadership practicum on the island of Aegna, but the Red Army had taken over by then and we had no business there any more.³ An exception was made for the candidate naval officers, who were given a choice of military unit. Most people wanted to stay as close to home as possible. For me that would have meant the 2nd artillery division, stationed in Rakvere. But one of my mates was assigned there, so I chose the armored railway regiment in Tapa. My duties there were the same as anywhere else. That is, until roll call one evening. As unit leader in training, I was in charge of evening roll call. After inspection and other necessary orders, it was the custom to sing the national anthem. There was no such custom in the Red Army. And since the Red Army was in power and this was the Estonian SSR, it was no longer appropriate to sing only the Estonian national anthem. Orders were that the Estonian national anthem, "Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja room..." would be sung first, to be followed immediately, with no intervening command, by the "Internationale." I wrapped up the inspection of the line-up and turned around. They started in on the anthem and then launched into the "Internationale." But that soon died out. I turned around and gave orders to start it again. They started over, but again it died down. I repeated the order. Then someone started in on "Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja room..." They carried on and refused to stop. Before they made it to the end, the junior officer interrupted them.

The next day there were interrogations: who was singing? I was responsible, since I had been in charge of roll call. I explained to the interrogating officers that according to procedure I was supposed to stand with my back to the line, and so I could not see who was singing

³ During Elmar-Raimund Ruben's military training, the Soviet takeover of Estonia took place in June 1940.

and who was not. A few days later they started to disband the units and merge the Estonian army into the Red Army. The men in our battery were scattered among as many units as possible. I ended up in the II Division of the Tapa Red Army artillery unit, stationed in the town of Kadrina. We had to cut off the epaulets on our uniforms, sewed insignia on the collar, and attached a red pentagon to our caps. The supervising officers now included a *politruk*.⁴

Under the previous regime, my term of service would have ended on 1 November 1940. In the Red Army the length of service depended on the military branch, and could last anywhere from three to five years. Length of service in these new circumstances was not discussed. Besides, a war was going on close by. The future was uncertain. With the takeover of Estonian conscripts into the Red Army there was also a need for cadres who could teach in Estonian. They began promoting junior officers who had served their time to officers. As a graduate of the candidate officers' course in the military academy, I was assigned to be acting battery commander. Prospects for getting out of the military became even more uncertain. They started pressuring me to stay on as battery commander. Then came the winter of 1941. I talked things over with Kaarel Parts, the commander of the neighboring battery. He said, "Your term of military service is indefinite as it is, and you will be here for at least a year or more: why do you want to serve for 15 rubles when you could get 300 for the same job? When you have served your time, if you don't like it, you can tip your hat and leave whenever you want. Serve out the winter here, and if you don't like it, go home in the spring to help out your mother and father." The seed was planted. Soon they showed me the orders appointing me to the position of battery commander with a monthly salary of 300 rubles and 131 rubles for food. I had become a professional soldier.

The first thing I did when I got my pay was to send my father and mother a small pile of crisp, brand-new notes. I continued to send them money from time to time; they had so little of it, and I had some to spare. Serving in the Red Army was military service like anywhere else, with the exception of political instruction, which was carried out by the *politruk* and his assistants. As summer approached there was talk

⁴ *Politruk*: military official in charge of political instruction of the troops, as well as monitoring them for any breach of ideological correctness or dissent. See also Glossary.

of going to training camp. In the first week of June we loaded ourselves onto a troop train in Kadrina and rode to Värskä, where a camp had been built in the winter. The opening ceremony was to be on Sunday the 22nd of June. Competitions were to take place that morning. Around noon I was called to the telephone in the staff headquarters tent. My phone call was interrupted by a more important one coming in. I waited outside, where the unit commander spotted me and barked, "What are you waiting for? Go back to the battery at once! It's war."

The opening ceremony was interrupted. We prepared for departure. The next day we were on our way to the Petseri train station. In the evening an airplane circled overhead, and one could make out black crosses under its wings. We arrived at Tapa in the middle of the night, where we picked up supplies, and reserve troops were brought in from the Jaroslavl area. On the eve of the 28th of June we pulled out of Tapa. We had been told we were on our way to defend the north coast. But in the morning, having arrived in Narva, we found out what kind of defense of the north coast they had in mind for us. We were forbidden to leave the echelon, which was surrounded by NKVD⁵ officers in blue caps. The crowd that had come to see us off, which was not allowed to approach the train, was singing, "Estonian boys, don't leave us..." There was nothing to do about it: at 3:30 on the afternoon of the 28th of June we crossed what used to be the border between Estonia and Russia.

We had no idea where we were going. On the second day we spotted a town with at least 20 church steeples to the left of the train. Those in the know said this was Novgorod. A few more days of travel, and then we started unloading. The sign on the station read "Staraja Russa." On the 5th of July the town had its first bombardment. The bombs fell in the vicinity of the railway station, and also on the airfield. Several airplanes and fuel depots were burning, giving off thick black smoke. On 7 July the planes came a second time, and then we were on our way again. Forty kilometres before Ostrov our echelon met with artillery fire from the side. The first section of the column kept moving, but the rear end was held back by the fire. This was on the afternoon of 11 July. Since we were told that the road ahead had been cut off, the company *komsorg*⁶ gathered the men left behind and organized a bypass

⁵ See Glossary.

⁶ Komsorg (group leader for the Komsomol). See Glossary.

around the danger zone. When he saw that I had a pistol, he asked for it. I turned it over, thinking nothing of it (a superior officer's orders, after all). That was the last I saw of it. Later I realized how unethical it was to leave a comrade unarmed on the battlefield, with the possibility of enemy attack from any direction. But I later realized that one could expect just about anything from them. We finally located the rest of our men, but the enemy had cut off all the roads, even those behind us. We were trapped. It was 17 July.

The next morning we made another unpleasant discovery. A group of our commanders and soldiers had gotten in a GAZ-A auto and driven across enemy lines. We could feel how closely we were being watched. The climate of suspicion persisted until we were removed from the front at the end of September. We sat in the abovementioned encirclement for almost a week, until one regiment was able to break through toward the rear and got us out. In the days that followed we kept up a steady retreat. Sometimes artillery fire was called for, but for the most part we were out of shells, or the ones that were brought were of the wrong caliber. Chaos ruled. Once we were moving west through the village of Rutno. The villagers, all old women, lamented—where could we be going? The Germans had passed through their village a few days earlier, on their way east, droves and droves of them, all day long. Some time later we, too, had to turn around, and go the way the Germans had gone. That was how it was during that whole first summer of war.

The morning of 30 July was lovely and sunny. We took up our firing positions behind a patch of willow brush in a meadow at the edge of the woods, behind a village. The enemy had forced its way into the village about a kilometer away. Our orders were to liberate the village. Our battery was to back our men up where needed. I readied the cannons. The *politruk* sat on the gun carriage of the howitzer, watching me. I finished aiming and sat down next to him to wait for orders. From up front we could hear intense rattling of guns. Soon soldiers came running from the direction of the village. Some of them ran right past us. "Are the Germans after you?" the *politruk* called to one of them. The man looked back over his shoulder, made a gesture with his hand, and kept running. Thinking that we, too, might soon be leaving in a hurry, I wanted to warn the tractor drivers. I was able to pass on the alert to the first one when I heard the shells coming. I had just enough time to throw myself down under the tractor wheels when the exploding shells

deafened me, and shell fragments hit the metal parts of the tractor. Three volleys were fired. I waited awhile longer, got up, and went back to my position. There was a sinister silence. Then I spotted four or five men on the ground. One was moving. I looked for the *politruk*, and he was a few steps ahead in the ditch. Some men appeared, and we turned him over on his back. A shell fragment had penetrated above his left shirt pocket. If I had gotten on my way just a minute earlier, I would have been where that *politruk* was. Was the messenger God, Fate, or some third power whose name I did not know? I cannot answer, but after that I believed He existed.

By the end of September the enemy had driven us to the marshes on the banks of Lake Ilmen. With nothing but bog all around us, there was no place to retreat further. But the enemy did not try to follow us, either; what could you do with cars and tanks in a bog? On 30 September the men who were left were lined up and told that the war was over for now. We were to be re-formed. The echelon took us across the Urals to the edge of the city of Nižni Tagil. We built mud huts for evacuees, followed later on by houses. And that was the extent of our re-forming. The workday was 12 hours long, the temperature 20–40 degrees below freezing. Food rations were 800 g of bread a day and a murky liquid with a few cabbage leaves swimming in it; for some reason they called this soup. Every now and then we would get gruel and even some herring. The consequences of this kind of existence soon began to be felt. In November we swelled up (arms, legs, face), then our teeth came loose and we lost any energy we had left (if you fell down you did not have the strength to get up again); in December the dying started. The future was dark.

I was assigned to be brigadier, though this job came with no privileges. Once I had to climb up and down among huge piles of boards and planks looking for appropriate materials. Somewhere in between the stacks of boards I spotted smoke rising. I got closer and stopped in my tracks. The smoke was rising from a field kettle, and there was a soldier tending it. He noticed me, too, and pointed to the *katelok*⁷ hanging from my belt. I handed it to him, and he poured in some of the contents of the steaming kettle: a liter and a half of herring soup. For two weeks I went “looking for materials” around the same time each day, and got a *katelok*-ful of the same soup. Of course I did not

⁷ Mess bucket.

mention this to anyone. There was a temporary gathering place for Polish soldiers at Nižni Tagil, and from there they were ostensibly sent through Iran to join General Anders' army in England. I figured out that they were Poles at our first meeting, when I saw the emblem of the white eagle on the cook's cap. The food they shared with me on my "expeditions" helped me survive, orders or no orders.

Once I was trying to fasten a roof beam to the frame of a building we were putting up. I swung at it with a heavy hammer, but I missed the clamp and hit my knee hard. My knee was painful; it swelled up, turned red and blue, and a few days later I had difficulty walking. It got worse with every day, and I had to lean on someone on both sides to get to work. Then I was ordered to stay behind in the hut on a daily ration of 200 g of bread. It was just my luck that a committee passed by to check on our living conditions. They took a look at my leg, and from the way they were talking I made out that I needed emergency surgery. The next morning I was on the operating table. At first the doctor wanted to amputate above the knee, but I refused. They did not cut off my leg, but they operated on my knee three times without anesthetic. The diagnosis was water in the knee. I was in hospital for over a month and a half. In all honesty, the food was good. When I was released the committee chairman said, "I am very sorry, but you are no longer fit to be a soldier." I was sorry, too, but after that I continued in the army for another 14 years.

Back in the labor camp, I discovered that all my companions had left, some to the Estonian division, some to convalesce, and others were buried in foreign soil. After 10 days of rest I, too, had to leave the labor camp. The leadership recommended that I go to the Estonian *kolkhoz*⁸ near Tšeljabinsk, and stop on my way at the Estonian SSR government headquarters,⁹ in that same town. I managed to walk with the help of a cane. Somehow I got to Tšeljabinsk, and found government headquarters, where I was given 150 rubles and directed to the main building of the Estonian *kolkhoz* Slava. There were 20 or so Estonian evacuees there (among them the writer Erni Hiir and his family). There I made a quick recovery, since I took my meals with that family. I worked in the construction and field brigades, but that did not last

⁸ *Kolkhoz*, collective farm; see Glossary.

⁹ Evacuation of the Estonian SSR government behind the front lines; see Glossary.

long. In June I was summoned to the war commissariat, and ordered to do 10 squats. I fell down on the floor after the first one, and there I stayed. On my call-up sheet they marked: *negoden* (not acceptable). A month later they called me again, but this time did not ask for any squats. They just looked me over and wrote: *goden*.¹⁰

In the reserve regiment of the Estonian Division I was assigned to be the clerk for Company III. One day two of my school buddies from Rakvere stepped into the mudhut—Isaak Serman (with whom I had shared a schoolbench), and Martin Kutti. Their words were brief: “The division is off to the front—we’re not going to leave you here. Wait for orders!” A few days later I heard my name mentioned outside. There was a rider with two horses. I was handed a note, which read: “Elmar. The white one is for you. Get in the saddle and come along! Kaarel.” Good old Kaarel from Kadrina days had found me! So I hopped into the saddle and 15 minutes later Kaarel and I were clapping each other on the shoulder. “We’re not going to leave you here!” Kaarel said, and when we left, “wait for orders!” And it was just a few days later that the familiar white horse was standing in front of my hut. I was touched by the care of my school buddies, but I was even more eager to be back with my buddies from the first summer of war. My school buddies were in the rifle regiment, but my frontline buddies in the artillery regiment. I arrived at the headquarters of the 23rd artillery regiment, Division III, where Kaarel was chief of staff. I was introduced to the commander, who said, sulkily, that he was not going to make any decisions about accepting me into the division without the commissar, who appeared shortly. The commander reported “They want to send us a new man. And to assign him to the position of a troop commander, no less. He’s sort of feeble and drags one foot along behind him. Commissar, is this a man we should look twice at?” The commissar answered, “I’ve seen that face somewhere in Rakvere.” The matter was decided. (By the way, Commissar Harri Raag was the first mayor of Rakvere (chairman of the executive committee) after the events of June 1940). I was assigned to be the commanding officer of a group of 16 men, my task would be to control and correct the battery fire. In addition to two howitzers there were two Studebaker cars. As the front lines drew closer I was given additional duties as division supply officer. They loaded the rye flour for the division’s bread bakery (31

¹⁰ *Negoden* (unfit); *goden* (fit).

70-kg bags of flour) onto my cars. I was responsible for a month or so worth of flour. When it came time to turn the bags over to the bakery, two were found missing. The division commander snapped: "If you don't find those missing bags within 3 days, you're off to the tribunal."

Finding two bags of flour was an impossible task. The head of the bakery was the stepfather of a girl in my high school class, and I had visited them once. Maybe he would have some good advice. I got in the saddle and went to see him. When we got to the topic of my being sent before a tribunal by the division commander, my schoolmate's stepfather responded. "And that's the right thing to do." That was the end of our meeting. I stepped out of his office and walked toward the door. Then I heard someone calling me. I turned around and saw one of my labor colony companions sitting at a table. "Why are you looking so gloomy?" I told him. The men sitting at the other desks grew wary. He stole two bags of flour! We kept on chatting for a bit, and the officials exchanged opinions on the matter, and someone went out and then returned. They felt sympathy for me: two bags of flour was a big thing. I shook my buddy's hand and waved to the others, but then I was handed a paper. I glanced at it. It was written on the *nakladnaja*¹¹ that the division bread bakery had received two bags of rye flour from Lieutenant E. Ruben.

Later we found out that the drivers, who were always tuning up their engines, and had free access to the cars under armed guard, had poured the contents of a bag of flour into their pails as they were leaving. They had taken it to the village and traded it to the women for moonshine. After all, we were camped in those woods for almost a month, and you never know when one bag or another would suddenly disappear. To think that someone might be called before a tribunal for this was beyond their mental competence.

On 10 December 1942 we were at Velikije Luki.¹² Liberating that town was difficult. The enemy was well fortified and we were inexperienced. Losses were heavy. The commanders kept thinking up new methods and slogans to meet the unrealistic deadlines set for liberating

¹¹ *Nakladnaja*, report.

¹² Battle of Velikije Luki, December 1942–January 1943. One of the battles of the Second World War where Estonian men found themselves on opposite sides of the front lines from each other. 2,000 Estonians in the Red Army (but not Elmar-Raimund Ruben) crossed over the front lines to the German side.

the town. When it was all over, we were given a rest period of more than half a year. I was told that I was being transferred to a rifle regiment. This news was shocking, and to be honest, unpleasant, since the artillery regiment was the elite unit of the division. Formally it made sense—I was being transferred from the position of group commander to battery commander, but there was actually a catch to it.

On 19 October 1943 I found myself standing before the line-up of my new battery. They were watching me with interest and distrust. The previous commander had been a good one, and that made my situation more difficult. The weapons, heavy mine throwers, were unfamiliar to me, too. We did not have the proper vehicles to haul them. The good thing was that the men had experience. In my short introductory speech I told them that I would demand a great deal from them, but if they had high expectations for themselves, we would get along. Then I spent a few months getting used to things, the weapons as well as the people.

Then I was put to the test. We were celebrating the new year 1944, raising our glasses as was the custom, and having a taste of “American aid,”—US tinned goods. At 3:30 AM the telephone operator handed me the telephone. “On the double!”, followed by a click. It was the head of Special Forces (*eriosakonna volinik*). I walked through the darkness and snow to his mud hut, where they motioned for me to sit down by a small table. The superior officer sat at the end of the table, almost right next to me. A projector improvised from a car battery was aimed right into my face. It was so bright that the superior officer shaded his eyes with his hand. It all started with the usual biographical questions. When he found out I was my parents’ only child, he expressed his sympathy, for me and for them. How my parents must be longing tonight for their fine son, their one and only! How I must want nothing more than to be there with them right now, and not just for this moment. Almost in passing they asked, “If another kind of government came to power in Estonia, a different one, would you go back to your father and mother?” The sad introduction and the extra drinks consumed in honor of the new year had done their work. I replied, that of course I would. Only when the inexplicable look of triumph spread across my interrogator’s face did I realize my mistake. This last question had been a “knight’s maneuver,” as they say in chess: if I said “yes,” they would have me, since this meant that I did not believe in the Red Army’s victory and was willing to go to a place where there was no Soviet power;

if I said “no,” only the first part of it would be true, that I did not believe in our army’s victory. I was caught either way. But then it was his turn to make a mistake. He asked what I would do next, once I got to that place where there was no Soviet power. I replied, “I would become a partisan.” I cannot describe his disappointment. His face fell; he stood up, turned his back to me, and I heard the words, “You can go now. Get out of here!” They forgot to tell me not to tell anyone about that meeting. Of course, what they wrote in their report may be another thing altogether.

The next ordeal followed a few weeks later. It was announced that the rifle regiments’ heavy minethrower batteries were to participate in the battles to liberate Novosokolnik. We were to support our attacking infantry. One night, while our men were resting and drying their clothes, they called for immediate fire in one location. The men rushed to the mine throwers, some even barefoot and in their underwear (the others brought them their felt boots and greatcoats). The mines were sent on their way. It was just our luck that the battery had been sent to that location just a little while earlier and we had been able to prepare the fire correction data for our defense line. We fired some volleys. Later the situation got clearer. A small Russian unit of 11 men was in a defensive position on a hill. In the twilight an enemy attack squad approached them in six trucks, and by later calculation this was over 100 men. The odds were uneven and it was quite likely that the attackers would have broken through and done a good deal of damage behind our front lines, where the commando and surveillance posts were, as well as some communication lines. The fire from our battery hit the enemy right in front of the defenders. The attack failed. In the morning they went out to inspect the battlefield. They counted two transport trucks, one heavy mine thrower, and over 60 dead.

Polkovnik Aru, the head of the Novosokolnik group of the Estonian Division’s artillery proposed that I be awarded the Order of the Red Flag, as the commander of the battery that had fired in that battle. That was only the beginning of the game. In those days not even the regiment commander had gotten an Order of the Red Flag. I was a newcomer, who had been sent away from the artillery regiment for suspicious reasons, who had had to prove his loyalty to a representative of the Special Forces. I was not even a Party member. How could someone like me be given such high honors? At first everything was wonderful. After we got back from Novosokolnik there was a parade,

with speeches and high praise, and a reception was organized for the officers, hosted by the regiment staff. Then I was given to understand that it would be a good thing if I received the Order as a member of the Party, and that this would be a great honor to everyone—myself, the regiment, and the Party. I asked for some time to think it over. Apparently I took too long about it. Then I was told that instead of the Order of the Red Flag, I would be awarded the Order of the Great Patriotic War. Since I was still “thinking it over,” talk of awards subsided almost completely. In early spring the squad commander and I were summoned to regimental headquarters. Our Orders of the Red Flag had arrived there, addressed to us personally by the commander of the division of those 11 men that had been on the defense on the hill near Novosokolnik. Added to those were ten medals “For Bravery” to be distributed to those sergeants and soldiers who had demonstrated extraordinary service during the firing. A commander of a different division than our own rewarded us—comrades in arms who had helped his men, within the limits of his power; his own men were sorry and jealous, and demanded additional sanctions.

We fired our next volleys from the other side of the Narva River. As we passed through Estonia, not a volley was fired all the way to Virtsu. There was no need. It was as if we were on an excursion through our home territory

We spent half of a month in Virtsu. The regiment was in Saaremaa, but we had not received orders to cross over. Then the regiment was devastated by the 200th Rifle Corps’ unsuccessful landing on the Sõrve peninsula.¹³ Travelling orders were relayed to me: I had two weeks to find two of the transport vehicles we had left behind, somewhere around Avinurme and Venevere. I got to Tallinn by car. Walking along Tatari Street I unexpectedly met up with the driver of one of the vehicles we had left behind. Both of the cars were in Tallinn in the company auto mechanics’ shop. Repairs would take another ten days. I decided to go home to Nigula to see my father and my mother. When I stepped through the gate, I heard the familiar sound of the threshing machine. “Much strength to you, Father!” “Elmar!” A second later we were hugging each other. At the sound of voices, Mother opened the kitchen door and she and my aunt fell to their knees. Their first reaction had been: a Russian soldier is attacking Father. Only when Father

¹³ The battles on the Sõrve peninsula—November 1944.

called out, "It's Elmar!" did they realize what was happening. Everybody was happy beyond belief. I was home for 10 days or so, and then it was time to leave again.

In the middle of February 1945 it was time to go to war again, this time to Courland.¹⁴ There we buried many of our men in foreign soil. But I was among those who returned. On the evening of 8 May 1945 we were ordered to halt before reaching our destination. As usual, I slept on a bunk in the covered van. In my sleep I heard shots being fired, and shouting. My first thought was, the enemy has broken through! I adjusted the pistol on my belt and opened the door to the covered van. There stood the battery leader, who saluted and said: "Comrade Captain, the war is over." The men were talking all at once, clapping each other on the back and hugging one another; from time to time someone would lift a carabiner or automatic rifle toward the sky and fire off a round of shots. Finally it dawned on me what was happening: we had been waiting for this and fighting for it the whole time. But now the war was finally over.

After being showered with flowers in Latvia, our march through Estonia took us finally to Tallinn and from there to a temporary stopping place in Klooga. We waited to be discharged from the army. They did, in fact, begin sending men home, starting with the older ones and those considered to be specialists of importance to the national economy. I was not among them. Then came those officers whose relationship with alcohol did not fit within peacetime parameters. I was not in this category either. I waited for my turn, but meanwhile, I had to say goodbye to my battery. I was reassigned to be chief of staff of the training division. I got used to my new job. Once a brigade headquarters clerk I knew called me into his office. He closed the door, locked it from the inside, went to a cabinet, rummaged around there, and took out a file. After paging through it he handed it to me. What was written there was "harbors some obsolete bourgeois-nationalist tendencies." I looked at the name on the cover of the file. It was mine. The clerk closed the file, put it back in the cabinet, unlocked the door to the room, brandished his fist at me, and said "Damned nationalist!" Both of us laughed, but it made me do some serious thinking. What would be the consequences of that "honorary title"?

¹⁴ Battles in Courland, February 1945.

We had conquered one enemy. Now it was time to find another one. And they had found one. It was me. I began waiting for the consequences. For the time being I did not see any changes. It seemed that there was not enough “nationalism” to warrant me being sent to Siberia. They didn’t fire me, either. Gradually I began to experience what the entry in my file meant. I was not promoted, even though the allotted time had passed. A while later I was dismissed from my job as chief of staff and reassigned to a lower position. I was a battery commander once again. Why did they not fire me? Without boasting I can say I was damned good in correcting artillery fire. I enjoyed playing with the shells, and aiming them quickly and precisely. In the artillery unit, I had become what in the air force is called a test pilot. I was given the most complicated assignments in directing fire. I directed it with the help of a pilot-observer; I carried out ricochet and *brisant* fire; I was positioned hundreds of meters up in the air in an aerostat, and directed the battery fire from there; I was given new artillery and mine thrower systems (models) to test, among other things. Most of the time I had great success. Since there seemed to be no more “career” trajectory for me, I tried to make serving in the military as comfortable as possible for myself. Once I had placed rather high in an officers’ shooting competition, and decided to try out my skills in this area. The result was that for nine years I belonged to the joint division team in handgun shooting. This meant four months of training camp each year, a month at military district Spartakiades,¹⁵ one month of special vacation in return for good performance, a total of more than seven months away from the everyday life of my unit. I wouldn’t say this was always a bed of roses. It was more like carrying a double load. Sometimes, such as during inspectors’ visits twice a year, one had to stand up for the interests of one’s unit. In return for serving two masters—or rather for serving one of them, I was Leningrad district champion twice in a row: in rapid pistol firing, as a member of a team of five, and in directing mine thrower fire.

I had to serve both masters so that both would be satisfied. Most of the time this worked out, but my success was eclipsed by my colleagues who were members of the Party. The party organizer started working me over. Knowing how much I enjoyed spending time outdoors, he used it to his advantage. We went on walks together in the woods. It

¹⁵ *Spartakiade*, mass athletic competition.

was mentioned off the cuff that I might submit my application, and as far as recommendations went, I had nothing to worry about. And so we continued to take walks together, enjoying the natural surroundings, and talking around the topic of joining the Party. When I did not bite, they started using other tactics: "Why have you not submitted that report yet?" Which one? They indicated which one. I had no idea! "But at our Party meeting we made a decision about that. Why were you not at the meeting?" Which one? "The others are all there, you're the only one missing." "There was a Party Bureau decision about that." There were other incidents like that, where I was cast in the role of the black sheep. And that was when I decided that it was really no skin off my back. The folks in the Party were people, too. I submitted my application. It was the summer of 1950. At the next meeting I was accepted as a candidate for membership. It was a quiet year. When half a year was left of the required year of candidate membership, there was no reaction. Then I was sent to Leningrad to the military academy, and at the first meeting I was accepted to membership, effective November 1951. I was a member of the Party. I did not feel anything special and nothing special happened. Besides paying my dues, life went on as usual.

Years later I talked about the old days with some school buddies, about being accepted into the Party, and the unusually long delay regarding my time as a candidate. Accepting me for Party membership had apparently been a mistake. And that was the reason for the long period of candidate membership. To solve the problem, it was decided to send me to military academy, and to allow another Party organization to accept me for membership. "Their own" were not implicated and remained clean. Was that really how it was? I was not really interested. Time went on. Then they announced the liquidation of national units in the Soviet army, which included the Estonian division. Some of the officers were sent to other units to continue their service; others were found jobs in military commissariats or demobilized. It was the year 1956. I had served in the armies of two nations for almost 18 years. My service in the Soviet Army entitled me to a pension, and the age of 37 I began drawing a pension of 630 rubles a month. I had three months to find another job. At first I took a rest at home, with my father and mother. They were now *kolkhozniks*, which of course was something new and difficult for them, both physically and mentally. I, too, had to set my life on a new course. Meanwhile I had gotten married. I had been old-fashioned about this. I imagined that before

getting married I had to have a stable place to live, a furnished apartment, and a steady job, where I did not have to go off for months at a time to training camps, polygons, exercises, or secret locations without postal service. After many hesitations I realized that despite the circumstances life could not stop. I got acquainted with a girl, and once we had gotten to know each other, found out we could live together, and so we got married. It was the last day of April, 1948. Jumping ahead, I should note that we have now celebrated our golden anniversary. We have two wonderful girls, Kirsti, born in 1952, who takes after me, and Helve, born in 1954, who is the very image of her mother.

It was time to get used to civilian life, and find myself a job. I had no civilian occupation, and had made a few helpless attempts to find employment. Then I discovered that Party members did not have to worry about such things. The Party—the Party Central Committee to be exact, would find them a job. I put off that visit, but I had to go sometime. I was referred to the Party Committee of the central *raion* of Tallinn, and was assigned to the Tallinn Textile and Dry Goods Factory as cadres inspector, with a monthly salary of 600 rubles. The factory manufactured ribbon and lace, and the personnel consisted of 300 women and 50 men. The manufacturing process was interesting. I began settling into my first-ever civilian job. And then the bomb fell: I was chosen to be *partorg*.¹⁶ There were seven to eight Party members among the workers, and another seven or eight had been coopted. At one meeting of the active Party membership of the city, my one-time schoolmates and comrades in arms looked at me, amazed, and demanded to know what I was doing there. They had gotten used to the fact that while they decided to go along with the new regime in the summer of 1940, I was left behind. When they were all political workers in the division, I had been a dyed-in-the-wool military man. Needless to say, not a Party member. That was why they were surprised. Apparently they had no idea that I had joined the Party. When I replied that I was the *partorg*, my friends burst out laughing: “You, a *partorg*?” They asked how much I was earning. When I told them, my companions exchanged glances. A few weeks later a letter came to the factory, requesting that I be turned over to the supervisor of the Council of

¹⁶ *Partorg*, abbreviation for Party organizer, whose role was to recruit members for the Communist Party and prepare them for the application process. See Glossary.

Ministers. I was assigned to the post of instructor for the organs of the local Soviet. I was to teach and inspect the executive committees of the cities, *raions*,¹⁷ towns, and villages. My responsibilities also included formulating administrative changes in the territories of the Republic. I worked in that department for the next 32 years.

What did I get for working in one of the higher state institutions of the Republic? I should point out I got my first apartment at the age of 46, after 16 years of living in Tallinn. Before that there had been periods of living in a four-room apartment with 11 people, 4 generations together in one space. The other reward for long-term service was the title of “retiree of national importance.” This came complete with some discounts in transportation and social services, but these lasted only for three years. After that came the Estonian Republic. My third reward, a heart attack, came in the year 1991, the crowning result of a long period of stressful work, at least that is what the doctors said. They must have been right.

I discontinued my Party membership in 1990. I no longer had any use for it, and it did not get much of anything from me, either, besides the payment of dues. I think neither side was particularly sorry.

Continuing my education also falls into this latter period. When it became clear that my service in a higher state organ might last a long time, I thought I should continue my studies. I decided on law, and enrolled in the distance learning department of Tartu University. It was difficult. I was over 40 and beginning to feel my age. The young folks went to exams with the attitude, maybe things will work out. This was impossible for me. I felt I owed it to myself to study the material at least at a B level. I also had to hold up the good name of the Council of Ministers. This kind of attitude slowed my studies down, and I was 51 when I graduated. I had fulfilled my father’s wish for me. He could not provide me with higher education, but wanted very much for me to achieve it. Unfortunately I did not do it in his lifetime.

One morning before work, the postman brought me a telegram: “Come home quickly. Father has fallen seriously ill. Mother.” I set out immediately. During the night Father had gotten out of bed and collapsed. The doctor was called in the morning, and he confirmed that he had had a stroke. The world’s best father was gone. Two weeks earlier I had been at his 80th birthday celebration.

¹⁷ See Glossary for Soviet administrative districts.

Mother was left alone. I asked her to come and live with us. She came, but grew sadder by the day. I could understand how she felt. In the morning we went to work, and the children went off to school. We came home late at night. She was home alone the whole day long. Not a single confirmation sister, neighbor, or acquaintance. In Nigula someone would always stop by to chat or to ask whether she needed something from the store. One night Mother said to me, "Take me home." With a heavy heart I did as she wished. The neighbor lady soon wrote that Mother no longer wanted to eat. I went to see her. It was true: she was tired, and would no longer lift a spoon to her mouth. I managed to put her in the hospital in Rakvere. She had a heart attack, and was in the hospital for a month. From Rakvere she was sent on to Kunda Hospital for rehabilitation. One day the phone rang beside my bed. When I picked up, I was told my mother had died. I accompanied Mother from Kunda to the Nigula church. We were late: The pastor and the others had been waiting at the church gate. But I had to take her home one last time, to the yard where she had once been brought as a young, 18-year-old farm bride. I had to do that for her: I loved her, just as she loved me.

From time to time when I am by myself, I think back on the road I have travelled. How does my life add up? What about my childhood? Thanks to my father and mother, I was given a love for nature, for animals and people, and for the two of them. Military service added to this a love of order and a belief in fate. Working in a high-level state institution acquainted me with leaders and ordinary workers, I had a chance to visit interesting places in Estonia, as well as farther away. My retirement has given me time to remember all that has gone before, and time for hobbies. After all, a person has to do something, or he goes into premature decline. The veterans of the Estonian navy get together once a month. We take excursions to naval landmarks (such as naval fortresses), and try to make a contribution to commemorating past leaders (J. Laidoner, J. Pitka). Once a month there is a gathering of those who "strove to be better tomorrow than they had been today"—the Boy Scouts. We remember the old days together, and try to give good advice to today's Girl Guides and Boy Scouts. In the summers I attend the orienteering club's Thursday meetings. It is a way to keep in good physical and mental condition, with the added joy of looking for and finding the checkpoints. I would be happy go skiing in the winters, but unfortunately that is against the doctor's orders.

There is always something to do at my summer home. At least once a year I tend my mother and father's graves. We plant flowers and I light a candle. I thank them and ask their forgiveness—I could have taken much better care of them. On those trips I also try to go to the woods and the bog near our home. I am glad when one of my close friends, my children and grandchildren call or come to visit me. I am contented that the woman who brought my children into the world, who has taught them and raised them, is still by my side after fifty years.

And that is all.



David Abramson

BORN 1923

I was born on 10 July 1923 in Tallinn.

Before the Second World War there were about 5,000 Jews in Estonia. I believe there are only 500 people left in Estonia today of the Jewish families that lived there before the war. My father, Max Abramson was born in Tallinn in 1880. My paternal grandfather was also born in Tallinn, around 1840. All that I remember of my grandfather is his great white beard, and I remember nothing about my grandmother.

It is known that the Abramson clan came to Estonia from Lithuania. My relatives on my mother's side came from Latvia, moved to Pärnu during the Revolution,¹ and lived there until the end of the thirties. My mother was born in 1899.

My parents were married in Tallinn at the beginning of the twenties. By the last years of the Estonian Republic my father had become a very rich man. He owned houses and businesses. He had acquired all of his wealth through steadfast, unrelenting work, ten to twenty hours a day. He stood behind the shop counter himself, went on business trips, and kept his own account books. At the end he also owned a dye workshop in Tallinn.

We lived in a very large apartment at number 4 Valli Street. For years there was a state insurance firm in that building.

Our family was of the Jewish faith. Both my father and my mother were consistent in their religious observances. Theirs was a gentle, everyday piety. Traditional Jewish dishes were prepared, such as stuffed

¹ The Russian Revolution, 1917–1918. See Glossary.

perch—the skin of the perch is stuffed with fish that has been put through a meat grinder, and then it is baked. A very tasty dish indeed! My Estonian wife also knows how to prepare it. Pork was not eaten in our home, but when my father went to the tavern with the salesgirls, he would eat everything. On Friday nights candles were lighted in our home. My father would wear his wide-brimmed hat, and read something incomprehensible to me in Hebrew. On high religious holidays my parents attended synagogue, and I would be taken along. I stood there rather unwillingly, because there were many more entertaining things one would rather be doing.

I began my education very early. When I was five I was taken to the German elementary school, and immediately placed in the second grade. The teacher thought there would be nothing for me to do in the first grade class. A few years later I enrolled in the German *Realschule* on Luise Street. I did not go there for very long. At that time there was a state law in Estonia, according to which minorities could either attend Estonian schools or their own national schools.² My parents did not think that the Tallinn Jewish high school was academically³ strong enough. Besides, they did not like the fact that the director of the Jewish school had communist views. Thus I was enrolled instead in the Westholm private high school, without a doubt the best school in Tallinn at the time. Of course Treffner considered his school in Tartu to be the best in Estonia, and of the girls' schools, the Lender gymnasium considered itself in first place.⁴ Our Westholm humanities education was superior by far to what is taught in the technical high schools of today. First, we mastered Estonian grammar, and never wrote the word *tegemata* with two t's the way some technical school graduates do today. Secondly, we studied several foreign languages: English, German (our home language, by the way), French, and in the last year of high school had a choice of Russian or Latin. We chose Latin. So we knew our languages. A good example of the fruits of this curriculum is President Lennart Meri's extensive knowledge of foreign languages. Lennart Meri was our schoolmate, my brother's classmate, in fact. During our

² Schools for minorities, established under the Cultural Autonomy Law for Cultural Minorities (*Vähemusrahvuste kultuuriseadus*) in 1925; see Glossary.

³ Lennart Meri, see Glossary.

⁴ Elite schools in the Estonian republic, both of which, the Treffner Gymnasium in particular, are strongly embedded in cultural history.

school days he would come to our house to play ping-pong. A few years ago we met the President at the grand opening of the Kave Plaza building. There was a large banquet on the upper floor. Meri saw me, walked briskly toward me, shook my hand, saying, "Hello, David, do you still remember me?" Of course I did, but I asked how he had recognized me. He replied that a president ought to remember such things.

I completed the 12th grade a few weeks before the war broke out. That year the 11th grade also received their diplomas, because the Soviet authorities decided they had had enough education, and took away a grade. This was the first step toward *desjatiletka*.⁵

During the Soviet era the name Westholm was held in contempt as the rich kids' school. Children from rich families did go there, but they were actually outnumbered by sons of recognized public figures, and there were also a good many students from very poor families. The principle at Westholm was that no one should have to interrupt their education for the lack of money. Old Westholm himself and the next director, Etverk, would assemble the parents and organize the collection of funds for the needy. There was a strong sense of solidarity at the Westholm *gymnasium*, and its alumni have always helped one another out. For example, during the first months of the war destruction battalions were formed.⁶ In our class there were two communists, Noormaa and Nigul, who joined the destruction battalion. But when those boys learned that many of their fellow graduates faced mobilization into the Russian army, they looked up their classmates, who were partying in some restaurant, and warned them to get lost. Thus the Westholm school spirit was stronger than politics. Even after fleeing Estonia former Westholm boys banded together and helped one another. My old classmates from Canada and the United States have told stories about it.

In September 1940 my father was arrested. There was nothing they could accuse him of, directly or by implication. Except for the fact that he was rich, and so it was necessary to lock him up. I was at home when they came for him. The men ripped the wallpaper down with

⁵ *Desjatiletka* (ten year plan): Soviet concept of five- and ten-year production plans, later extended to the educational system. At the time Abramson is talking about, Estonia had 12 years of education (ending with grade 12 of high school), while in Russia there were only 10 grades.

⁶ Destruction battalions, see Glossary.

their bayonets, looking for valuables hidden behind the walls. That was my first acquaintance with Soviet power, the beginning of my “great friendship” with it.

My father was sent to prison camp somewhere in Kazakhstan. He returned to Estonia in 1946 with one eye missing, a human wreck. He died in 1964. In reality our family has suffered a great deal more from the Russians than the Germans. Among our relatives, the Germans killed one family who had remained in Pärnu during the war, and one of my uncles, who was a doctor. But eight of my maternal relatives were tortured to death in Soviet prison camps.

Just before the war we had finished building a new house in the suburb of Kivimäe. It was located on Vabaduse Boulevard, where there is now a shop, recessed a little from the street at the Jannseni bus stop. Our house was next to the shop. It was a beautiful, modern structure. My father wanted to invest his money wisely. The furniture had already been carried in, but we were not able to live there for even a day. Some men from the Russian destruction battalion took over the building, caroused there for a few days, and then burned it to the ground as bourgeois property.

On the 6th July 1941 we were evacuated: my mother, myself, and my younger brother Gabriel.⁷ At Lasnamäe we were put in a local railway car with benches. Our journey took three weeks. The first time we got out of the train was at Chelyabinsk. Gabriel’s new bicycle, which we had dragged along from Tallinn, was stolen right in front of the railway station. We could not keep our eyes on it the whole time. Then again, we simply could not imagine that anyone would steal it.

From Chelyabinsk we were taken to the Kurgan *oblast*. We landed in some abandoned village. The overall impression was depressing—poverty, stupidity, backwardness. Luckily, we were not in that village for very long. My mother got an invitation from her brother, who was living in the city of Tjumen a few hundred kilometers away, to come and live with him. My mother’s brother, Sima Goldberg, had been evacuated there from Moscow along with a factory that was manufacturing wooden propellers for Soviet aircraft. My uncle took his relatives under his wing, since as a “specialist in the war industry” he had many advantages.

⁷ Evacuation in 1941, see Glossary.

My greatest wish was to find a way to continue my studies. The main obstacle was language—I knew no Russian at all. I could compare this situation with what the local Russians here in Estonia are saying today about their language problems—some of them do not want to learn Estonian, others think there is no need to know it, and still others think it is too difficult. When I began my higher education, I simply had to learn the language as quickly as possible, and I managed this in the space of two or three months. I have never formally studied Russian grammar, but I do not believe I make many mistakes in spelling.

There was no opportunity to study in Tjumen, so I went to Novosibirsk, where there was an institution of higher learning, the Railway Engineers' Institute, that exempted one from military service. Of course I could not demand that Estonian be made the second national language at Novosibirsk. I simply had to speak Russian—and I passed the entrance examinations.

There were only three people from Estonia in that city: myself, Hilda Vares, and her mother. Hilda's father was the brother of Dr. Johannes Vares-Barbarus,⁸ her mother, Maria Davidovna, was a Jew. We visited each other frequently. Later Hilda Vares lived in Estonia for a while, and after that in Leningrad. She was married to a Russian officer.

What did I live on while at university? The wartime university was really more of a work-camp. We would be sent to the *kolkhozes* to harvest potatoes and grain, and other such work, but we earned no money for it. It did teach you something, though. I had a driver's license, which I had received just before the war. Since my father owned an automobile, I had done some driving as well. The family I lived with in Novosibirsk was very kind. They gave me a room to share with another university student. When they learned that I could drive, they helped me find a job quickly. Overall I have to say that when you relate to Russians on a personal level, they are very good and friendly people. Gathered together in larger numbers, they become impossible.

At that time in Novosibirsk, a person with a driver's license was about as extraordinary as an astronaut in today's terms. I got an evening job distributing vodka at the local distillery. When it came to vodka there were two prices: the state price and the free market price. The ratio was about 1:500. I was not paid any wages, but at the end of every

⁸ Johannes Vares-Barbarus, see Glossary.

workday I was officially permitted to buy one bottle of vodka at the state price. For two bottles of vodka one could get a kilo of butter, chrome leather boots, a suit, etc. The price ratios were turned upside down.

I worked with a “GAZ AI-AI” automobile, the engine ran on wood gas. In the trunk was a stove heated with wood blocks. Every week I was also given a bottle of gasoline to warm up the engine. So I rattled along and lived quite well, considering, of course, that this was a time when many people were experiencing abject starvation. A driver’s license does not mean much today, but in those days it saved my life.

In the fall we were shipped by riverboat from Novosibirsk up the Ob River to work in remote *kolkhozes*. We lived in a farmhouse, which was kept painfully clean on the inside. The unpainted wood floor was scrubbed with sand every other day until it was white. But the weather had already gotten very cold. The locals would pull up fence posts and burn them for fuel in the stove. This may seem strange, since the village was surrounded by a thick forest. The truth was, no one had bothered to chop any wood during the summer. Apparently they would make new fence posts every summer and the next winter burn them in the stove again. That was the way of life.

The rampant anti-Semitism I saw in Novosibirsk was an unpleasant experience. I had never experienced anything like it, nor have since. The Westholm high school had instilled in me an understanding of the equal worth of all peoples. There were only a few Jewish students at Westholm, but we had no problems at all there. I remember that one of the students used a derogatory word for Russians, *tibla*. Director Etverk made a big deal of it—he had no tolerance for ethnic hostility or disparaging attitudes. But in Novosibirsk anti-Semitism was considered almost stylish.

In the summer of 1944 I was drafted from the Institute into the army. I had almost completed my schooling. During the war, the period of study was shortened to four years, and all I had left was to get my diploma. I was sent to Omsk to a reserve battalion for basic training. It was a time of famine. As soon as we got to the front conditions improved. I was a private in a Russian battalion, and my war journey took me from Byelorussia to Lithuania, and from there to East Prussia. I was in the guard patrol for staff headquarters and due to my guard duties I never participated in actual battles. In the army I had no difficulties due to my Jewish nationality. In the military true ethnic

animosity cannot really exist: in the tumult of war no one can ever know for sure where the bullet comes from. Men who have been in the German army say the same thing. On the front lines there cannot be any mutual hostility on that level.

Today there is a great deal of polemic going on as to who was on the right side in the war, who on the wrong side. As if those men who fought in the Estonian Legion were on the right side, heroes, all of them, but those who fought in the Estonian Infantry Corps,⁹ were doing the wrong thing. That is all nonsense. No Estonian man who fought against the Germans could even imagine that they were fighting for the cause of establishing Soviet power in Estonia. Everyone wanted Estonia to be a free country. Some wanted to liberate Estonia from the Germans, others from the Russians. And the destruction carried out by the Germans was no small matter, either. Even I could not imagine that Russians would remain in Estonia and occupy us for another fifty years. To blame the Estonian Infantry Corps for helping bring about the occupation of Estonia is the grossest injustice. I am not talking about the commissars and the communists; I am talking about the majority.

For me, peace came at Königsberg. But for our division the war was not over. In a long troop train we were hauled through all of Russia to the Far East, to the Chinese border to face the Japanese. That campaign was like a military parade. Those battle-tested units of the Soviet Army that arrived there were simply not able to seize the territory as quickly as the Japanese units surrendered them. We advanced at the speed with which water, gasoline, and ammunition could be hauled to supply the troops.

I was fortunate enough to make it to Port Arthur. I was of course in demand everywhere, because I could translate. Then came the decree that men with higher education were to be demobilized at a faster rate, and I traveled that long, long way back to Europe.

In Estonia I was reunited with my mother and brother, who had arrived ahead of me, but my father was still in prison. My earthly possessions consisted of a soldier's overcoat, a *gimnastjorka* and a pair of trousers.¹⁰ At that time Hendrikson was mayor of Tallinn. I paid him

⁹ The Estonian Corps was composed of Estonians mobilized into the Russian Army. See Glossary.

¹⁰ *Gimnastjorka*, uniform shirt, used both for the military or school uniform.

a visit and got a requisition form with which to buy a pair of pants, a shirt, and a coat. That was how my peacetime life began.

Before the war I had had a childhood romance with a Jewish girl. After the war we met again, dated for a while, but then I had to leave. In the meantime the girl had married a businessman of Jewish extraction from Riga, who was then imprisoned for a long time. Our love was ended by my departure to foreign parts: it so happened that I was sent to Germany. In Potsdam there was a commission composed of four nations—the USA, the Soviet Union, Britain, and France—that was to divide up the ships that had belonged to Germany and distribute them as war trophies among harbors around the world. I was transferred to that commission, as a member of the Soviet delegation. A large, elegant villa had been designated for us in a Lübeck suburb, and there the experts carried out their task of locating and acquiring the floating docks, tugboats, passenger liners and freighters reserved for the Russians, and arranging for their transportation to Russian harbors. My role there was somewhat undefined—I translated, made arrangements in various offices, procured food provisions from the British, supervised service personnel, etc.

I spent over a year in Germany. It was a very interesting time. We made trips to London, Amsterdam, Belgium, Finland, and six or seven times to Sweden to receive the ships. While people in Germany were living in half-starvation, we were at God's own banquet table. To those foreign delegations who came to transfer ships, black caviar was served, as well as some of the finest appetizers, not to speak of expensive liquor.

When I returned to Tallinn, I worked in the Food Industry Trade Union as secretary to the committee on the republic level. That job did not last particularly long. Then a period of time began in which all of my jobs ended the same way, with the discovery that I was the son of a wealthy businessman.

When my trade union career ended, my next position was as director of the payroll department in the Fisheries Ministry. The minister himself, Karl Raud, was a very wise old man. The most important event connected with that job was that I found myself a wife. We lived together for two years and then divorced. I was fired from the Ministry, as it was the custom to say then, because of my father's wealth. I had been hired with enthusiasm—I had been in the military, studied in Novosibirsk, and had not lived in Estonia under the German occupation.

Everything fit. I had never concealed anything about my past, but the fact that my father had been the owner of large businesses was always discovered “suddenly,” as it were. My third job was in the Ministry of the Chemical Industry. They let me work there for half a year. However, once again Minister Neiman soon felt that the sons of former business owners were not a proper fit for a Soviet institution. I went to work in Tartu in the Fisheries Industry Trust, and that lasted for some years, until it turned out again that I did not fit. One of the deputy ministers of the Fisheries Industry, Varnavski, went to work in the Party Central Committee. From there he sent a letter to Tartu saying that Abramson, son of an owner of large businesses was unsuitable for a position of leadership, that he was to be removed without delay, and fired from the fisheries industry. Of course there was no employment law or workers’ rights at that time. Get a move on, and that was it. But times were changing, and *anketas*¹¹ were starting to go out of fashion. For some years I was left to work in peace as the director of the Wages Department in the Maardu Chemical plant.

On 8 March, 1960—I remember it exactly, because it was on International Women’s Day—I started working at the Tallinn Metal Products Industry, which some time later became the production group “Vasar.” I was a lead worker in a variety of capacities. “Vasar” was a well-functioning establishment. Its productivity could have been much higher, if it had not been directed by the rather stupid local Industrial Ministry, which became all but oppressive in the time of Minister Jürgens. I was there almost thirty years until the year 1989.

Then came the Estonian Republic, and with it, privatization. A group of people from our factory decided to privatize the Tartu Aluminum Factory (at that time it was referred to as Plant Number Five of “Vasar”). We operated successfully for five years. Then the factory building was repossessed by its rightful owner and we had to end production. I am firmly convinced that big mistakes were made in the reclaiming of industrial properties. Buildings of well-functioning enterprises should never have been returned to their original owners or their heirs. If people had been robbed of anything, they should have gotten monetary compensation. Under my very eyes a respectable factory became unproductive; thirty people lost their jobs, and plans for

¹¹ *Anketa*, personnel record, which included information about family and political background. See Glossary.

development were brought to a standstill. It would have been much more just if the owner had been compensated from the profits of the enterprise, which was functioning successfully in the buildings of the former owner. That way the growth of our industry would have continued.

Our family was compensated for a part of my father's fortune. The house at 24 Viru Street was returned to us, the one where the McDonald's is located today. There were no legal ambiguities concerning the return transaction. My brother and I were direct heirs of my father, not "the second cousins of the cow's second cousin."¹² But the municipal authorities were very quick to push us aside in order to start earning money themselves. It is permissible to be greedy for money, but not in an ugly way, at others' expense.

In the meantime I had met my present wife, Helju, in the production group "Vasar." She had just graduated in economics from Tartu University. The apartment situation had us worried, as there was simply nowhere to live. I even started to ponder the idea of resettlement in Israel. I had grown up Estonian-minded and speaking Estonian. School, friends, and family were all tied to Estonia. But I was very angry that I was not given an apartment. I wrote a long letter to Arnold Veimer, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers. The subject of the letter was why living quarters were given to immigrants from Byelorussia and whomever else, but not to me and to others who had lived in Estonia for generations, many of whom had had to struggle along for decades in some kind of barracks. The letter was six pages long, and there was a big scandal. The Central Committee and the KGB were informed, but no apparent official institutional consequences followed.

In those days it was easy for Jews to leave. Israel did not interest me very much, though; I would have gone right to America, where I would not even have had a language barrier. We had many friends abroad. We submitted our papers as a family, but what we were most afraid of happened—I was not granted an exit visa. The official reason given was that since the war between Israel and Egypt had just begun, the life of a Soviet citizen could not be put in danger. A very humane standpoint, I must say.

Fortunately, I finally got an apartment. We are still living in the high-rise in Mustamäe where we have been for thirty years now.

¹² Popular Estonian saying for far-fetched relations of kinship.

And that is my whole story. I have a son from my first marriage. His name is Sven Andresoo, after his mother. He is a track and field coach. I have two grandsons and one granddaughter. My wife's son from her first marriage has grown up in our family. He is a doctor in Rakvere. I myself think of myself as rather young. After all, a person is as young or as old as he feels.



Evald Mätas

BORN 1921

I first saw the light of day on 15 November 1921 in Tallinn, in a little house owned by the Rotermann flour and bread factory near the Russalka memorial in Kadrioru. I was the third child of my father Oskar and my mother Minna, their only son. My two sisters were born before the First World War in Russia, near Jamburg, at the Breluga manor, where my father was head gardener. He had gone there around

1900, soon after completing his gardener's training at Telliskopli in Tallinn. My mother's family had also gone to Russia many years before the war. That was where my parents met and were married in 1909.

Father came back to Estonia in 1917, in the whirlwind of revolution,¹ and settled in Tallinn, but he left a year after my birth because of poor job prospects, and went to Ontika, in Viru county. When I was 5 years old, the family moved to Rakvere. There a woman read my palm and predicted that I would go far in life and become a rich man. The first half of the prophecy has been fulfilled, but the other half has not come true at all. We were not in Rakvere long—again Father could not find suitable employment. When I was about seven years old we moved to Ubja manor, where there was a large apple orchard. If I remember correctly, Father helped the tenant who rented the orchard and also did odd jobs around the manor.

As a child I was spared feeling any of life's hardships; my first years were spent playing happily with other children. From time to time the workmen at the manor would scare us with stories that a man with a big sack would come and pick up little boys, stuff them in his sack, and

¹ The Russian Revolution (1917–1918), see Glossary.

take them away to make soap out of them. That gave us enough of a fright that we kept well out of the workmen's way.

These carefree days passed quickly, and as my eighth birthday approached, I had to start thinking about school. The Aluvere elementary school was about five kilometers from Ubja manor, and Father said that was too long a way to walk. Around the same time, in the year 1930, he made plans to leave Ubja for Voldi manor in Tartu county. Voldi manor belonged to Colonel Karl Parts, a veteran of the War of Independence, who had received it from the Estonian Republic as a reward for military valor.² It was located about 25 kilometers from Tartu on the way to Tallinn, on the banks of a beautiful lake, Saadjärv, which was rich in fish. A friend and I soon became avid fishermen. Once we caught a 16 kilogram pike at the Voldi end of the lake, so big that it rocked the stern of our flat-bottomed boat.

In the summer of 1930, many squirrels were seen in the manor garden. Older people said this was a sign that troubled times were coming, a great war and great suffering.

In September 1930 nation-wide military maneuvers were held in the Voldi-Saadjärve area, with headquarters at Voldi manor. I remember General Reek sitting on the brick steps of the oven in our house, munching on a sandwich. There were two junior officers billeted with us during the maneuvers. They said they would send us gifts from Tallinn and promised me a revolver. I thought that it would be a real one, or at least a popgun, the kind that was popular among boys in those days. The package came, and instead of a popgun, there was indeed a revolver inside made of chocolate. That was the big disappointment of my boyhood.

In the fall of 1930 I began attending the Voldi elementary school, about two kilometers away. I had already learned to read at the age of six. I did rather well in school, but sometimes played pranks as well, as all boys do. My classmate Voldemar Vadi and I were the best athletes in the school, and took turns taking first place in competitions. Often we would go jogging in the garden located near the school.

I enjoyed school very much, and did not miss a day for three years straight. If I had a cough my mother would cure it with hot milk and

² Manor properties expropriated from Baltic German owners during the Land Reform were redistributed preferentially to veterans of the War of Independence.

honey. In the summer, we would play a game with wooden pins during recess and in winter there would be snowball fights. We had skis made out of barrel boards.

When I had completed the fourth grade at Voldi, Father was hired as caretaker of the church grounds and the War of Independence memorial at the Äksi church. He would also care for graves at the Äksi cemetery, for those families who needed a caretaker. We lived across the road from the church, and had a garden plot near the house where Father grew vegetables and flowers.

My last two school years were spent at the Orge six grade elementary school in Sootaga township. The school was about five kilometers away from home. I entered the fifth grade with Evald, a boy about my age, the son of a nearby homesteader. We became good friends. After the war, fate sent us our separate ways, and years would pass until I saw him again. In the early autumn and spring we would walk to school and back together, and in the winters we would board in the school dormitory. There was a common kitchen. Most of our food, such as sauerkraut, had been prepared at home ahead of time, and we only had to warm it up. The girls usually did more cooking. We had a great deal of fun.

Between the end of the school day and supertime we had to study for a few hours in the classroom under the supervision of the teacher. The school had a large library, and I enjoyed reading the so-called leatherstocking stories about Indians. The other boys dubbed me Indian chief Winnetou and Evald was Old Shatterhand, my good “pale-face” friend. I also played the lead parts in school plays.

When I was in the fifth grade, a fourth-grade girl began to take an interest in me. I even got my first kiss from her. Mari was a farmer’s daughter. Today she rests in Canadian soil.

In the summers I had to help my parents out in the garden with watering and weeding, but there was still plenty of time left over for fishing with Evald and other summer fun. I was a member of the Young Eagles and participated in many camps.³ I have the fondest memories of the nationwide Young Eagles’ camp held under the Pirita pines in 1935. I also enjoyed track and field and skiing in the winters.

³ Young Eagles, youth organization similar to but independent of the Boy Scouts. Active during the Estonian Republic.

When my school years at Orge came to an end it was time to make plans for the future. I liked the idea of becoming a teacher, but I was not accepted into the Tartu Teachers' Seminary. I persisted with the idea of continuing my studies. In the fall of 1936, admissions examinations were held for the Tartu Technical High School. Even though most students had taken the examinations in the spring, I was one of the few who were accepted in the fall.

This marked the beginning of my school years in Tartu. Classes were held in what in those days was the Tartu Boys' Gymnasium, on Riia Street, next door to St. Paul's Church. In addition to general subjects we also had classes in wood and metalwork. I was enrolled in the construction department. With our teacher, Tartu city architect Mattheus, we would often visit construction sites, including the site of the Tartu market building, still standing on the banks of the river Emajõgi. Another one of the popular construction teachers, a man named Toom, had been an officer in the Tsar's army. After half an hour of teaching his subject, he would spend the rest of the lesson telling all kinds of stories about life, which the boys very much enjoyed. He insisted that there was more to education than book learning.

In the spring and early fall, I would take the Tartu-Jõgeva train back and forth from school. In the winter I would board in town, in various lodgings. Father would provide the owner with vegetables and other produce, and the rest of my rent would be paid in cash. Of course I would always go home for the Christmas holidays. Christmas Eve was a solemn and festive occasion, and I would accompany my parents to church.

In the spring, when school was out, civil defense exercises were held in military garrisons. In the summer, I worked for the Tartu municipal gardener as a park caretaker, along with Eduard Nurk, who at that time held the Estonian record in the 400 meter dash. He was a wonderful fellow, tall and dark. I later heard that he fell victim to the communists in Tartu in the summer of 1941.

Later on I applied for a practicum in Rakvere, where I had lived as a small child. The work I did for the city council there, which I very much enjoyed, was quite similar to the technical work I would do later. I was almost grown up now, and could be my own boss. On weekends I would bicycle with my co-workers to the beaches at Võsu and Vainopea. At the end of the practicum I cycled from Rakvere home to Äksi.

Then came the fall of 1939. Hitler's Germany attacked Poland. This did not have much of an impact on us immediately, since we were still schoolchildren. Schoolwork went on as before. Families of German extraction began leaving for Germany, including a boy from our class named Simberg. He was sad to be leaving, but there was nothing to be done about it. Greinert, the son of Äksi's former German pastor, also left for Germany. Though he had been born and raised in Estonia, he was very German-minded. When Poland fell, he mockingly remarked to my father, "*Ei teah*, what happened to Poland?"⁴ He spoke perfectly clear Estonian, but affected an accent.

In the spring of 1940, I returned to the Rakvere city council for another practicum. Turbulent times were coming, and one fine day the Russian army marched along Narva Street into Rakvere. Underground communists came out of hiding. A shoemaker, totally clueless, except for the fact that he was a stalwart Communist, was appointed to the post of municipal construction councilor in Rakvere. On one occasion we were summoned to a demonstration in the people's park, where we had to sing the "Internationale," but we made up our own words to it. As representative of the municipal government I had to take measurements of all the apartments. Russian military personnel were quartered in private apartments, and Estonian tenants had to squeeze themselves into smaller spaces. The mood was very different from the previous year. A dark shadow was falling over Estonia.

In the fall I returned to Tartu to begin my last year of school. Russian language was added to the curriculum and made a required subject for graduation. One boy from our class joined the Communist youth organization, but he was the only one. We often teased him, but he never betrayed a single one of us. He was a communist by conviction, one of the true believers. Slovenly, bizarrely-dressed people from Russia appeared on the Tartu streets, and people started to call them "bag-men" (*kotimehed*).⁵ Our nickname for them was "students from Kazan University."

Classes were held in the afternoons. I worked mornings as a draftsman on the railway, as I had been doing since my third year of high

⁴ Repatriation (*Umsiedlung*) of Baltic Germans 1939, see Glossary.

⁵ *Kotimehed* (bag-men) or *kotipoisid* (bag-boys): underage boys and men, mostly from Russia, who rode the trains with goods to speculate with.

school. Since my parents' income was meager and my expenses were increasing, I needed the money.

At the end of May, assembled under a huge five-pointed star in the school hall, we were handed our school diplomas. Our first class reunion was to be held in five years. But everything around us was heading downhill, and one boy from our class quipped that when we got together five years from now, some would have a box of nails on one foot, and an envelope on the other.

I continued working on the railroad until the 14th of June 1941. That morning when I got to work, the supervisor, a Russian fellow, said they would no longer be needing me. Something unusual was going on: carloads of people were being brought to the train station. An older mechanic from my workplace was taken away, along with his family. At first we did not know what was happening, but later it became clear that people were being deported to Russia.

Then came 22 June 1941. Germany attacked the Soviet Union. A general mobilization was immediately declared in Estonia, and young draftees were summoned before the military commission. Myself included. At the time I had tonsillitis, and so the medical commission declared me unfit for military service, at least for the time being. My friend Evald, however, was accepted. He refused, and said he would hide in the forest instead; all he needed was a way to get out of Tartu. I gave Evald my free passage railway certificate, which did not carry a photo. He was lucky: he slipped through inspection at the city limits and disappeared.

During the first half of July the roar of cannons could be heard from the south. The German army was drawing near. Red Army units retreated north of the river Emajõgi, blowing up the Tartu Stone Bridge behind them. Before the Germans arrived, Estonian Home Guard units entered the city⁶ and started to restore order. I signed up for the Home Guard as well. We combed the streets for remnants of Russian destruction battalions hiding out in cellars and bombed-out buildings.⁷ German forces marched into the city about a week later. For the next two weeks Russian and German cannons kept up a pitched battle. There were fires here and there. Finally, the Russians pulled their forces back from the north bank of the river, and with that

⁶ Home Guard (*Omakaitse*), see Glossary.

⁷ Destruction battalions (*hävituspataljonid*), see Glossary.

all of Tartu was liberated. At home all was well. It was the middle of August and a rather warm summer.

Toward the end of August the formation of an Estonian volunteer military division began on the Tartu Exhibition Square. This was to be the first Estonian national battalion, Major Vask's battalion, in popular parlance. Evald resurfaced from the woods and together we signed up. On 1 September we began the foot march to Tapa, where we spent a few nights. Then we were loaded onto trucks for the trek to Russia. We headed south from Narva and stopped at Slantso, where there were ammunition depots at the edge of the settlement in the forest. My group was left behind as a guard patrol. Some time later the group moved on toward Leningrad to secure the railroad. My section went to a village near Kikerino to guard a field hospital. We got our food supplies from the nearby German unit. One fine day the German unit left, and we started looking around for our battalion headquarters. We found it in Ljuban, on the Leningrad–Moscow railway line. Company No. 3 was dispersed. Evald's group went to Tosno, and mine to the village of Kausta, as security forces. A few weeks later we left the village of Kausta for Pomeranje station on the Leningrad–Moscow railway. Soon we received orders to move the whole battalion to the vicinity of Volkhov. The Russians had broken through from below Tikhvin across the Volkhov River and the railway, and one unit was in the forest near the village of Minevza.

On New Year's Eve we marched through heavy snow at 40 below freezing for some 20 kilometers, toward the village of Minevza. When we got there, we discovered we were actually on the front lines. Company No. 1 was forced onto the Volkhov River, where about a dozen of our men fell. We were there for a few days, in incredibly cold weather. We made pyramid-shaped tents out of pine branches, and built a fire under them to get warm. Later we built proper bunkers underground. The front held there, and we began guard duty on the railway embankment. After a few days we were sent back to the village. Warm clothing and other supplies were sent from Estonia. Some of the houses in the village of Minevza were bombed and burned down. One of the houses where I lived also got a direct hit.

In the front line bunkers another battle raged—against lice. The worst was when they started to stir under our greatcoats while we were on patrol. Once I went to the sauna at Ljuban, but it did not help very much.

One time when marching back from the front to the village we found ourselves under minethrower fire. One of the boys was killed, and a few were wounded. A piece of shrapnel passed through my trousers, luckily missing my leg. In February, I got sick and was sent to the infirmary in Ljuban. They did not do anything there, except put me on a train to Riga, where I lay in the hospital for a week. My fever went down, my lungs were found to be clear, and I was discharged from the hospital and sent back to my unit. In Tartu I met a boy from my group. Together we traveled to Narva to the Hermann fortress, and we were to be sent on from there to rejoin our unit. Rumors were flying that we would be sent who knows where as reinforcements, and that it was by no means certain that we would join our own men. We turned around and went back to Tartu, and made our way from there through Pskov and Luga back to our own unit.

In February, Major Vask quit his position as battalion commander—he could not get along with the German leadership. In the company, though, it was business as usual. I went on guard duty on the railway crossing a few more times, and then I was appointed company clerk. In the meantime, my good friend Evald had been seriously wounded in the leg and was in hospital. After his release he went to Finland. I saw him again in August 1944 among the Finnish Boys.⁸

In May we left the village of Minezva, and went on an offensive toward the north, where the front lines were supposed to be somewhere in the woods. Once we were even caught in an encirclement, but the German “Stukas” rescued us. Two of our men were killed when they stepped on landmines. Our march ended in a clearing somewhere, with the sound of shooting coming from nearby. We were ordered to leave all heavy backpacks behind and I was assigned to stay behind and guard them. The men moved on toward the front. I pitched a tent and piled the backpacks around me to protect me from shrapnel. Exhausted, I fell asleep alone in the middle of a clearing in the woods. In the morning the men came back. Only twelve were left. We were pulled back behind the front lines.

The new battalion commander was Alfons Rebane, later a colonel decorated with the Order of the Knight. I was given a week’s leave and

⁸ Finnish Boys: Estonian young men who volunteered for service in the Finnish Army in spring 1943, as they did not want to fight in the German Army. See Glossary.

traveled home. The week passed quickly. On the way back to my unit I became sick with a high fever, and went to hospital in Narva, where they suspected malaria. After a few weeks in hospital the fever went down. Meanwhile the battalion had been reformed in some nearby village.

Since we had been on the Volkhov front for almost five months, what was left of my unit was sent to the area of Gatšina in August 1942, and assigned to guard a civilian prison camp. Service there was uneventful. Soon we were sent back to the battalion. Around the same time my leg started hurting around the knee. So it was back to the hospital once again, this time in Tartu. The diagnosis was inflammation of the mucous lining of my knee, and I was ordered to take a rest from active military duty. Because of my knee injury I was officially discharged from the army. I began the trip home as a civilian.

For the time being I stayed in Tartu, but in October I decided to go to Tallinn to look for a job. I got an apartment on Paldiski Road together with my sister Veera, who was working in a shop. Since I had worked on the railroad in Tartu, I was hired as a mechanic, first in the 6th line department in Tallinn Harbor, later in the Tallinn-Väike department. The work was interesting. In the summer of 1943, I was confirmed in Kaarli Church, and in fall of the same year, enrolled in the Tallinn Technical University in Kopli. Before Christmas I even passed some examinations. For some months I was also a substitute teacher in the railroad school on Tehnika Street.

At the beginning of 1944 there was another mobilization. Rumor had it that railway workers would not be mobilized, but this was not at all clear. I decided to volunteer for the army once again, in order to have a choice of unit. The commission asked whether I had any writing skills. I replied that I could manage that, and so I was assigned to be assistant to Major Saulep, the head of the mobilization commission at Harju district military headquarters.

On the evening of 9 March I was visiting friends on Pärnu Street when the air raid alarm sounded. It did not take long for the bombs to start falling. The three storey wooden building where we were located shook; windows were shattered, but we were not hit. The whole city was burning. After the bombing stopped I hurried home. In my apartment the windows were all shattered and the oven had toppled over. A bomb had fallen on the corner of the neighboring house.

Then came Thursday, 21 September. The Germans blew up several warehouses and buildings in the city. I was walking along Tatari Street when a huge explosion sounded from the direction of the harbor. A few seconds later the window frames fell to the street. My friend Hendrik and I went back to headquarters and burned all the mobilization documents we could lay our hands on. We thought about how to get out of the city and head west, but there were no means of transportation. We walked to Raua Street to my friend's relatives' house, where we spent the night. Then we moved on toward the harbor, thinking we might find a ship there. We found one, and joined the military people and civilians who were shoving their way aboard. We found ourselves a spot somewhere under the stairs and hoped for the best. I would never see my home again.

On 22 September 1944, on a Friday morning at 6 AM, the ship pulled out of Tallinn Harbor. We later heard that Red Army tanks had arrived at Tallinn's Freedom Square at 11 that morning. We were bombed at sea, but we were lucky not to take a direct hit. The ship made a stop in Liepaja Harbor in Latvia. Military personnel were ordered off the ship and lined up in the harbor. Civilians were put on a waiting truck. The soldiers had to stay behind as reinforcements for Courland. At the right moment, when a lieutenant was walking toward the other end of the line, Hendrik and I instinctively ran around to the back of a truck and climbed on. We quickly pulled on the jackets we had with us, and this saved us. There was a lot of commotion in the harbor, and no one noticed our escape. The truck drove to a schoolhouse in the city, where we were sent to a refugee-processing center to get permits to travel to Germany. We were asked our destination. We answered, "Dresden," and that was where we ended up. In Dresden we stayed with the parents of a German officer we knew, where we washed and rested. Dresden was still intact then, a lovely city.

On the second day we registered at the Employment Office, where we were issued temporary passports. Hendrik's sister and her children were sent from Dresden to the mountains of Sudetenland where they had a place to stay.⁹ Hendrik and I were given a small room and stayed

⁹ Sudetenland is the term for the western region of Czechoslovakia inhabited by ethnic Germans and relegated to Nazi Germany under the Munich Agreement between 1 and 10 October 1938. At the end of WWII, the Potsdam Conference ordered ethnic Germans to be expelled from the Sudetenland.

in Dresden for another month. Finally, we were sent to Brүx in Sudetenland, where we registered with the local police precinct. There were coal mines in Brүx, and huge building projects were underway to expand the railway. We were assigned work on the railway, I in the technical division, Hendrik in administration. Like the Germans, we lived in well-constructed barracks. We fibbed that during our escape the ship had sunk in Liepaja and that we had swum ashore, where we had been given the clothes we had on. We were issued ration cards and bought civilian clothes. Now we were really civilians from head to toe.

The work was easy, but the days were long. The midday meal was brought to the workplace, mostly potatoes and gravy. Later on we began to experience hunger. Although we divided our weekly loaf of bread into pieces, we would often eat it up within 3 or 4 days. Some vegetables could be gotten without a ration card. If there was any to be had, we got 100 g of lard or meat a week. A crust of black bread sprinkled with sugar was a special treat. But we always felt hungry. There were plenty of apples and pears to be had that we could buy to supplement our diet.

In April we were suddenly summoned before a military commission. There was no way around it. We were shown Hjalmar Mäe's directive that all Estonian men were to be drafted into the army.¹⁰ Hendrik said that we could not accept such a directive, since we had no nation and no head of state. The head of the commission replied that in that case we would go to jail immediately. Since we had military uniforms and pistols in our backpacks, we allowed ourselves to be drafted. Based on the military school training course we had had at Männiku we were made lieutenants and sent home to await a call to active duty. That summons never came, since a few weeks later all concerned had to leave Brүx. The roar of Russian cannon fire could be heard farther away in the mountains. Before we left, railway director Grau called us into his office and wrote certificates releasing us from railway duty. We were free to go wherever we wished. That goes to prove that there were kind people, even among members of the Nazi Party.

We hauled our bundles to the train station, intending to travel south, showed the military police our certificates, and shoved our way onto the train. But the train only went as far as Eger (today Cheb). We trudged on, on foot, to a civilian camp near Eger. The next day we heard that all the people there were to be repatriated. Officials with red

¹⁰ Hjalmar Mäe's directive in 1944, see Glossary.

armbands were bustling around in the camp, and things looked pretty iffy. We decided to take off and head for Bavaria. After walking quietly through the gate, we avoided the main roads and made our way mostly around the edges of the forest. We threw our pistols into a river: it was risky to carry them, given the situation. In the meantime escaped Russian prisoners of war were driving around and deprived me of the watch I was carrying in my breast pocket. Finally we reached a mountain stream, which was supposed to be the border between Czechoslovakia and Germany. A German forest patrol we ran into knew when and where it was possible to cross the border into Bavaria. We crossed the stream unnoticed, and there we were. Where to go from there? There was no means of transportation, and all trains were at a standstill.

After a little rest we moved on southwards, and, in a German village, offered to work for food. Workers were sorely needed. Hendrik was hired in the village elder's farm, and I in another one. Their farming methods were primitive. They worked with teams of dry cows. They said their ancestors all had worked that way, why should they do things any differently? At least we could fill our bellies: in a farm one could always find this or that.

We stayed in that village for three weeks. Then we heard that there was some kind of refugee camp in the works in the city of Bayreuth, where they were accepting DPs (displaced persons). The local train line was already functional and so we rode to Bayreuth. There was indeed a camp there with barracks and all, where Poles and Balts lived side by side. Later the Balts were separated from the Poles and taken outside city limits to a place called Wendelhöfen near the *Wagner Haus*, where there used to be a psychiatric hospital, with double rooms. There was no shortage of food, since we were under the care of UNRRA.¹¹ Many Estonian soldiers came to the Wendelhöfen camp, especially from Czechoslovakia.

Before the end of the war Hendrik's sister and her three daughters had traveled from Sudetenland to Götz in Austria. Hendrik wanted to

¹¹ UNRRA: United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association, founded in a meeting of representatives of 44 nations in November 1943 to assist in the repatriation of World War II refugees.. The organization had significant roles to play in organizing the health and well-being of Displaced Persons in camps in Germany, including Baltic refugees. UNRRA ran out of funds in 1947, and yielded its functions to the IRO (International Refugee Organization).

bring them to Bayreuth. In January 1946 we traveled together to get them. I wrote a letter to my sister in Estonia, which was mailed by a local in Switzerland. If the letter arrived, Veera would recognize my handwriting. My parents and sisters had had no news of me since September 1944. As it came out later, Veera did in fact receive the letter, and everyone had been very happy to hear that I was alive.

And so all of us traveled back from Götz to Bayreuth. Since we got tired of sitting idle, and in order to make practical use of the time, Hendrik and I decided to go to Munich to attend the recently-founded UNRRA university. We of course had no idea how long we would be in Germany, nor whether we would ever be able to leave. I enrolled in the construction engineering department and Hendrik in the faculty of veterinary medicine. The professors were from various countries, and the language of instruction was German. I got myself a small room with a German family. We were officially on the list at the Wendelhöfen camp, and travelled there once a month to make an appearance. In Munich we had German food ration cards. From the camp we got Red Cross care packages and for one pack of American cigarettes, which cost 100 marks on the black market, one could buy a whole month's worth of rationed food. Our student headquarters and gathering place was the Estonian Committee on Kaulbachstrasse. Munich was full of bombed-out buildings. When walking in the dark, we always moved in groups, for there were often muggings and attacks among the ruins.

My room was unheated in winter. The owner only heated the kitchen, where everyone gathered. On cold evenings I often went to the nearby cinema, where it was a bit warmer and there were more people. In those days plenty of anecdotes and witty sayings spread among the people. For example, when they showed the weekly review in the cinema, and when Stalin stretched out his hand to salute Churchill, the audience would shout, "Davai Uhra!" (Hand over your watch!)

As time went on, it became increasingly clear that we would never see our homeland again, and that we had to emigrate somewhere and start life over again. My plan was to go to Canada, but the application process dragged on and on. In the meantime, Hendrik and his sister had left the Bayreuth camp for Geislingen, and from there he planned to go on to America.

In the town of Amberg, south of Bayreuth, an Australian Commission was formed, with a particular preference for young people. The future of Europe was dark. The Russians had occupied half of it, and

it seemed there was no point in staying. I went to the Australian Commission and was accepted for immigration on 24 February 1948.

Our journey first took us from Amberg to Diepholz, near Bremerhaven. On 20 March 1948 we boarded the ship "General Black." There were 112 Estonians. Our shipload was the third DP transport to Australia, and the only one to cross two oceans via Panama. This was due to the war between Israel and the Arabs, and it was risky to travel via the Suez Canal. From 23–27 March there was a heavy storm on the Atlantic. One day the waves swept over the top deck. Many were seasick. We were at sea for five weeks. Estonians formed their own choir, organized chess competitions, dances and boxing matches. I sang in the choir, took part in the chess competition, and beat a Latvian in boxing.

We spent one day in the Panama Canal, and then crossed the Pacific Ocean, which at that time was still as a mirror. We arrived in Melbourne on 27 April 1948, disembarked on the morning of the 28th, in order to take the train to the Bonegilla transit camp. We walked across a dry field into the Bonegilla camp, which was located on the Murray River in the province of Victoria. The natural surroundings seemed very strange to us.

A group of men was placed in each barracks. It was warm in the daytime, but the nights were cold. We cursed this damned cold land we had ended up in, because we had been told it was warm here.

We stayed in Bonegilla for about three weeks, studying English, and eating mutton every day. After three weeks were up, they started to assign us to jobs. The terms of immigration were that we were obligated to work for two years on a state contract. Some of the men were assigned to cut sugar cane in Queensland, and I applied to join them. It was supposed to be warmer there in the north, after all. There were eight men and one married couple in our group; the wife was our cook. We were assigned to Innisfail, about 2,500 kilometers north of Bonegilla. There was a medical check-up: those who went to cut sugar cane had to be in excellent health, since this was hard work. That year there was a large sugar cane crop, and there was a high demand for harvesters. We had no idea, though, what this work involved.

We traveled for three or four days to Innisfail, a town with a population of 5,000. The farmers had been told that the Balts were coming. They had no idea who these "Balts" were. When we got off the train at Innisfail, one farmer remarked, "Look, they are white like us." They

probably thought we were “colored folk.” Our farmer, Alan Crocker, had a farm named Daradgee seven kilometers north of Innisfail. It was a well-ordered place. We were lodged in barracks with electric lighting, two men to a room. The weather was subtropical and humid. A jacket was needed only at night. At night all kinds of strange noises could be heard from the bush, and that took some getting used to. The croaking of the large sugar cane frogs sounded like horses.

For the first three months we had trouble getting used to the work. Our backs ached and the palms of our hands were blistered from hoisting the rails of the outdoor railway. Later we got used to everything. It was piecework and everyone was paid equally, even the cook. At first we earned 9–10 pounds a week, later 12–15 pounds. A pound a week went to buy food. We were all young men, and spent money here and there. Saturdays and Sundays were off. On weekdays we went to work at six AM, worked until ten, then had four hours off for lunch during the hottest time of the day. In the afternoon we worked from two until six. Before harvesting we burned the dry leaves from the sugar cane stalks. The burning process was quick and intense, and all kinds of creatures got caught in the fire, especially snakes. On the weekends we went to Innisfail and stayed in hotels. One time a local newspaper reporter interviewed me to find out what kind of a fellow I was, what I had been doing earlier in life, and the article was published in the paper. On some weekends the farmers would also drive us around on sightseeing trips.

On one occasion we decided to have ourselves a proper party and invited all the local farmers. We decorated the area under our farmer’s house with fresh tree boughs. It should be mentioned that houses were generally built on pilings about 2.5 meters above ground, so that the wind could pass through underneath. We got the tables and chairs ready. Food, beer, and stronger drink were brought from the local store, and the party was off and running. On Sunday night some women came looking for their men and found them napping in a corner. For months afterwards there was talk in and around town about what kind of men these Balts were. Our prestige among the locals rose even higher.

The sugar cane harvest lasted from May until December. The rest of the time the cane was left to grow. Whoever harvested sugar cane for a whole season was freed from the state work obligation in 1.5 years. At the end of the harvest on 1 January 1949, we were sent back to Sydney.

I and some of the other men were assigned to railway construction work. Our lodgings were small two-man huts on the banks of the Parramatta River, where they were just in the process of building a bridge. The local head engineer asked me what work I had been doing before. When he heard that I had some technical education, he hired me in the office to do calculations. Later he advised me to continue my studies at the Sydney Technical College. The course of study there was five years, mostly in the evenings, since most of the students worked days in their chosen area of specialty. And so I began my studies, and the head engineer organized a job for me at the New South Wales railway headquarters in downtown Sydney.

At the end of 1949, I got sad news from Estonia. My father had died in December, and was buried in the Äksi graveyard. After that my mother moved to Tallinn to live with my sister Veera.

At the railway headquarters my official designation was Assistant Engineer Class 3. Thanks to the work I had done before in Munich, I was given credit for the first two years of study at the College. At first the studies were difficult, since Australia did not have the metric system and I had to learn many things over again. There was a great deal of work—almost five days a week in the evenings, sometimes Saturdays as well. In three years I finished my studies at the Sydney Technical College and graduated with a Civil Engineer's diploma.

I rented a small room about 15 minutes train ride from town, near the station. In 1953 I began work as a full-fledged engineer in the Maritime Services Board of the province of New South Wales. This would remain my job until my retirement in 1982. In the meantime, I took some additional subjects at the New South Wales University, where in addition to my diploma I earned a Bachelor of Engineering degree. This was a great help to my career. Three years before my retirement I was promoted to head engineer in the New South Wales Maritime Services Board.

In 1953 I found time to get married. Indeed, it was about time. My wife, Evi Kumari, is also from Rakvere. We settled down to ordinary family life. At first, we lived with Evi's parents, in order to save money to start our own home, a goal we accomplished in 1964. We have lived here all this time, now only the two of us, since our son and daughter are living on their own.

In 1958 our son Rainer Ivo was born, in 1960 our daughter Karin Thea. Both are now married. Rainer has two children, an eight-year-

old son, Jared Rainer, and a little five-year-old daughter Eliza. Our son is married to an Australian. We are trying to teach Estonian to our son's children. They are often over at our house. They call us "nänni" and "papa." Our daughter has no children. Both Rainer and Karin live close to us. We help them often, as much as we can, since we are so-called pensioners and there is no clock to punch. Our life is never boring, and often I think to myself, how did I ever find the time to go to work?

In our free time my wife and I have traveled a great deal, both in Europe and in our own area. We have also made several trips to Estonia. After all, Estonia is our real home. In 1990 I was reunited with Evald, the friend of my youth. He was also married and a father, living near Tartu at Lähthe, not far from our former elementary school, which no longer exists. We made plans to meet again in a few years, but fate intervened. In 1993, Evald went to his rest in Äksi cemetery. Six years of forced labor in Russia had taken their toll. In Estonia we were reunited with many former companions, but in the meantime many had gone to their final rest. My mother died in 1979 and is buried at the Liiva cemetery. My older sister and her husband are buried in Rapla. My younger sister Veera, her children and grandchildren are the only close relatives we have left in Estonia.

My buddy, Hendrik, went to America, completed a degree in medicine instead of veterinary studies, and is now retired. He was a physician with the rank of colonel in the United States Army. We correspond regularly.

In conclusion, I have to say that I have worked hard my whole life, and with good results. There has even been some luck in life, and fate has been merciful.

This piece of writing is dedicated to Fate itself, which has caused us to wander—without asking about our intentions—to the home that raised us, and to those who have been humane helpers in life on what was often a bitter road.



Heljut Kapral

BORN 1923

Most of my forebears on my father's side came from a fishing village on the Kandle beach in Haljala township. Father would tell stories about his grandfather Joosep, who had served for many years in the Tsar's army. After attaining the rank of corporal, he was assigned to train soldiers. After his retirement people started to call him Corporal-Joseph, and this was how we later got our family name. In 1914 my father,

was mobilized into the Tsar's army. During World War I, while on the front lines, he was wounded by shrapnel. After his recovery in hospital he was not sent back to the front, and instead went to work at the Otsa engine depot repairing locomotives. While still in Russia, he survived the horrors of the October Revolution.¹ It was not until 1921 that he succeeded in officially repatriating to Estonia.² He arrived home to find that his parents were dead, survived by his sisters Elvine, Pauline, and Salme, through whom he was later to meet my mother.

My mother's side of the family came from the townships of Simuna and Laiuse. Mother's father Madis and her grandfather Mihkel had both been manor overseers. One of my mother's unforgettable memories was picking blueberries in the summer with her grandfather Toomas, when she was six years old. Before beginning the picking, her grandfather knelt on the blanket spread out on the grass next to Mother and prayed. He put his hands on the little girl's head and blessed

¹ October Revolution, referring to the second phase of the Russian Revolution (1917–1918), see Glossary.

² Repatriation (*opteerumine*) to Estonia in 1920–1921, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution and the beginning of the independent Estonian republic.

her, and the son who was to be born to Mother one day, when Estonia was free. In 1914 Mother was married, and a year later awaited the birth of her first child. She had hoped for a son, although Estonia was not yet a free country. A daughter was born, who was given the name Hilja. In 1920 an epidemic of scarlet fever claimed both her husband and daughter, who were buried together in the same grave. Weighed down by her sadness, the inconsolable widow mourned her dear ones. Time passed, and a girlfriend's brother crossed her path. This was August Kapral, whom she married in 1922.

I was born in Tallinn Central Hospital on 19 June 1923, early in the morning on a Tuesday, at 4:30 AM to be exact. I was the son my great-grandfather had foretold and blessed ahead of time, looking forward to the time when Estonia would be free. I was christened by Pastor Sommer. My aunt Salme suggested the name Heljut, which reminded her of the Biblical Elihud of the line of David. The first event I have memories about is suffering from diphtheria when I was two and a half years old. I lay in Aunt Salme's lap, wrapped in a blue quilted blanket. I felt terrible. I was given an injection in my thigh, upon which I lost consciousness. When I opened my eyes again, I saw Aunt Salme bustling about above me. Most likely what saved my life was diphtheria antitoxin, which had only just become available.

In 1927 my sister Salme was born. We all rejoiced over her. My mother stayed home, Father went to work in the railroad warehouse in Tallinn. Peace and mutual affection ruled our household. My maternal grandmother Leno had been religious from a young age, and my mother shared the same beliefs. Father had had fewer dealings with religion. My mother became a believer in 1930, my father some years later. This brought many changes to our home. Cigarettes and strong drink disappeared; my father and mother grew even closer to one another. My cousin Endel and I began attending Sunday school.

I began school on 1 September 1931 at Pelgulin Elementary School. My cousin and I were bench mates. Endel was a better student than I was. We spent our summer holidays at my grandparents' farm in Kiltsi, where a pure stream of clear water flowed through the pasture, and it was fun to splash, fish, and swim. Grandfather's house in Kiltsi was over 100 years old.³ The farmhouse had a thatched roof,

³ Compare the descriptions of traditional farmsteads by Linda Põldes and Tanni Kents.

small windows, and a low, narrow doorway. The doorsill was high, just the right height for sitting. The door opened into the threshing room, where there was a large threshing oven and a hearth, where Grandmother did her cooking while the oven was being heated. The roof of the oven was a comfortable sleeping shelf. Below the ceiling there were beams where sheaves of grain were hung to dry. Our big worry was the living room ceiling, which was in danger of falling in. Grandfather had propped it up in several places, making the living room look like a miniature columned drawing room. Mother and Father decided the obvious: that we should move to the country to Grandfather's place for three years to build a new house there. Father had now become supplies distributor for the Estonian Railroad. His job allowed him to come to the country often and to spend weekends with us. A free railway ticket, valid throughout the republic made everything easier. Soon a building crew was put together. Trees were chopped down in the woods. Logs were hauled home, some of which were taken to the Kiltsi sawmill to be sawed into boards. Orders were placed for windows and doors. Construction began in May of 1935, and by fall Grandmother and Grandfather could move into their new house. During the building, everyday farm work still had to go on. Endel also spent summers in the country, so he joined me with the farm work and herding. We made ourselves an athletic field behind the house and trained in the evenings. On nice quiet evenings we would climb onto the roof of the new house and play duets on the wooden flute; these could be heard many kilometers away, delighting the people of the village.

Because of our temporary move to Kiltsi, I continued my studies at the Kiltsi elementary school at the old Kiltsi manor house, five kilometers from my Grandfather's home. In the winter you could take a shortcut through the woods on skis. I did not have difficulties with my studies in the new school. But the interests of rural children were alien to me, as was the school slang and the overall mentality. They played *laptuu* in the schoolyard, throwing the ball as hard as they could. That first autumn I started out the weakest in the class. Anyone could push me down and shove me under the bench. By the next spring I could stand up to many of the boys in the class, and three years later I was an equal among equals, better than most at throwing the ball.

Then we moved back to our old apartment in the city. I had been admitted to a new school in Tallinn—the Tallinn National English

College, and enrolled in the second form of the *progymnasium*.⁴ Within half a year I caught up with my classmates both in English and German. Foreign languages had not been taught in the rural school. I had no problems in my other subjects. In the spring of 1938, our school music teacher, Gustav Ernesaks handed me the school flute and ordered me to learn how to play it by fall term. I took a few flute lessons from Vaarandi, flautist at the Tallinn Garrison. By the fall I could play well enough to participate in the school symphony orchestra, directed by our second music teacher, Leho Võrk. In the fall of 1939, my cousin Endel said he wanted to apply to the Tallinn Conservatory in violin. Only a few weeks remained until the entrance examinations. I chose a piece and learned it quickly. I submitted my application, and Endel and I went together to the conservatory, to join a large group of waiting applicants. My first examination was in *solfeggio*, followed by a specialty examination a few hours later in the conservatory concert hall. When I stepped in, carrying my instrument and my music, there were some very imposing gentlemen sitting in front: professors Artur Kapp, Raymond Kull, and professor Vaks, but the flute professor, Evald Brauer, was not among them. "Well, play something for us," said Artur Kapp. I had hardly played half the piece when he tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Enough!" I wanted an explanation, and asked whether I had gotten in or not. Three men laughed loudly in unison and Artur Kapp said I had to come back a week later and look at the results posted on the school bulletin board. A week later we went back to the conservatory. My name was up on the board, but Endel's was not. The hardest part was still ahead of me. I had arranged things without talking to my parents. The Conservatory tuition was 12,000 cents a year, more than my father's monthly salary. What was there to do? There was no choice but to tell Father and Mother, who listened calmly to my story. Then I had the bright idea to tell the Conservatory director, Juhan Aavik. I trembled as I knocked on his door. I poured out my story, of how I had taken the examinations unbeknownst to Mother and Father. For some reason he was well disposed toward me, and, after a long conversation, he handed me a sheet of paper and asked me to write an application for a tuition exemption. My heart leaped for joy. At home the news was also received with rejoicing.

⁴ *Progymnasium*: preparatory division, four years, for high school (*gymnasium*) that students attended after completion of elementary or basic education.

An impalpable restlessness hung in the air. From General Johan Laidoner's⁵ speech that spring at the closing exercises of the Tallinn schoolboys' military training course at Männiku, it was clear that there was serious trouble in the air, though this was not stated directly.⁶ On 28 September 1939, the Soviet Union forced Estonia to enter into a mutual pact of non-aggression. Then, on 21 June 1940, the Päts-Laidoner-Uluots government was overthrown. Interrogations, disappearances, and arrests began, followed by orders to turn in all radios and bicycles, which were strictly enforced. Our school, The National English College, was abolished and reopened under the name Tallinn High School No. 9. The school staff was replaced. Academic work continued, but now in a new style and according to a new mentality. The great deportations were a huge shock to our people.⁷

In the spring of 1941, Paul Rahno, the head of the statistics department Estonian SSR People's Commissariat for Agriculture, offered me a position as senior statistician in the planning department, a job I held until the Commissariat was dissolved in July 1941. The war began on 22 July. Work at the Commissariat continued, but there was a taint of war in every undertaking. Soon male workers were obligated to keep scheduled night watches at night. A general mobilization was issued for men 18–45 years old. Fortunately, I was too young by a year, and my father was three years too old. Workers were fired, and the staff was evacuated behind Soviet front lines.⁸ And so I, too, joined the ranks of the unemployed. My father was also fired from the railway. Tapa had already been taken over by the Germans, leaving my mother and sister on the other side of the front lines. We were weighed down by worry and lack of news. The only bridge left between us was prayer to God. A few days later the recently fired railway workers were sent to the Laagedi station to dig antitank trenches. I was sent to the Tower Square to dig bomb shelters. When the trenches were ready, I was sent on to build a supporting airfield near Veskimetsa. There I experienced a real miracle. We had chopped and bundled quite a large pile of brushwood,

⁵ General Johan Laidoner, Commander-in-Chief of the Estonian Armed Forces, see Glossary.

⁶ Military training that was a normal part of the high school curriculum, carried out at the beginning of the summer holidays. See Evald Mätas' life story for another account of this military training.

⁷ Deportation of 14 June 1941.

⁸ Evacuation, see Glossary.

and were sitting on top of it, taking a break. I suddenly had the idea to make one more trip to the soup kitchen, and that thought would not let go of me. There was a good view of the Kopli Bay from there, where a loaded freight ship lay at anchor. It was rumored that the ship was full of destruction battalion men, escaping to Leningrad.⁹ Unexpectedly a low-flying German plane appeared; the ship got a direct hit and disappeared right in front of our eyes. It was a terrible sight. Back at our worksite, to our horror, we found a bomb crater one meter in diameter, right where we had been sitting.

Just before evening on 27 August, there was a sudden knock on the door. There stood a young woman who had just come from the harbor having said farewell to her husband, who had been mobilized. A man (I knew it must have been Father) had given her my address and asked her to go immediately to bring me the news that the men had been taken to Lagedi harbor to load ships, and that most likely they would not be allowed home again. German cannon fire had already reached the harbor. The air was full of bluish smoke: everything there was burning. The Soviet warship “Kirov” was firing relentlessly on the approaching German front. I borrowed a bicycle and raced toward the harbor, hoping to bring my father back. The Red Army guard patrols pointed their guns at me and forced me back. There was nothing left but to turn back and go home. During the night the roar of battle died down. From time to time one could hear the panic-stricken Red Army soldiers, running toward Kopli, where they probably hoped to find a ship to board. On the morning of 28 August it was unusually calm and quiet. The freighter *Eestirand*, where my father had been, got a direct hit from the air near the island of Prangli, and sank.¹⁰ There was no further news of my father.

Tallinn was now in the hands of the Germans. We were anxious to get to our relatives in Kiltsi, but trains only began running a few weeks later. At the station I heard that my family was alive and well.

⁹ Destruction battalion, see Glossary.

¹⁰ In August 1941, the freighter *Eestirand* was used to transport 3,500 Estonian men who had been mobilized into the Red Army from Tallinn to Kronstadt. The *Eestirand* was bombed by German planes while still in Tallinn harbor, and sank. 44 men perished, hundreds jumped overboard, and roughly 2,670 men reached the nearby island of Prangli, where they successfully avoided mobilization.

The only shadow on the joy of our reunion was the question of where Father was.

In 1942 I graduated from high school. Already as a child I had longed to study medicine, but now it was impossible, since I did not have a certificate proving prior service in the German army or in the work battalions.¹¹ At the director, Edgar Rajandi's invitation, I started working in the Tallinn Family Records office,¹² while continuing my studies at the Conservatory. In spring 1943 a total mobilization order was issued. My flute teacher, Evald Brauer, played in the Police Battalion orchestra (formerly the Tallinn Garrison orchestra), and he invited me to come along. I agreed. From May 1943 on, I was a musician on soldiers' rations, which were a good deal more generous than civilian fare. I could thus contribute a healthy food supplement to my Aunt Paula's table.

The situation at the front deteriorated. The Germans drew on their last reserves, and so 20 men from our orchestra were reassigned to the 288th Police Battalion. Since I was on vacation, I was not put on the list, instead another man from our orchestra was, a father of four children. I thought two months would not be a long time, and went in his stead. The battalion was formed in Tartu. When we got to Lithuania, the quartermaster summoned me and announced that he had recommended me to battalion commander, Major Saimre, as company *Rechnungsführer*. My job included minding the food and supply stores. It was not until January 1944 that the battalion was moved back to Tallinn for rest and reformation. In May 1944 the First Police Regiment was formed, under Major Saimre, who in the meantime had been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. Once again, he appointed me *Rechnungsführer* for the company headquarters. The battalions were stationed in defensive positions on Estonia's north coast, with headquarters at Oru.

¹¹ The requirement for matriculation in university under the German occupation was participation in the RAD (*Reichsarbeitsdienst*), the Reich Labor Service, formed in July 1934 as the official state labor service and an instrument to combat unemployment; during the Second World War it was an auxiliary formation which provided support for the Wehrmacht. During the German occupation of Estonia (1941–1944) there was significant pressure for Estonian men participating in RAD to volunteer for military service. See also Glossary.

¹² The office where births, marriages, and deaths were registered.

In July 1944 the II Police Regiment was formed, and again I became headquarters *Rechnungsführer*. We were soon sent to the front, and stationed near Daugavpils, in northern Lithuania. The front was about 10-15 kilometers away. The summer weather was warm, and ripe cherries were plentiful. I was assigned to travel to the north coast of Estonia to visit all of the former battalions and officially sever economic ties with them. I began my journey on a beautiful evening with a lovely sunset. In the morning, in Riga, I learned that the Russians had begun a new offensive that night. Our regiment had been crushed. If I had not been sent out of the way, I could have become yet another casualty. The Red Army drew near. On 18 September our company was ordered to march to Pärnu, in order to be evacuated to Germany. When we reached Märjamaa that night, we were told that in Tallinn the blue-black-and-white flag had been raised on the Pikk Hermann tower. That same day Uluots had sworn a new government into office, headed by Otto Tief.¹³ The official radio report was that Estonia would remain neutral in the ongoing war. The II Battalion of Finnish Boys and Pitka's armed bands sought to defend the capital, but they did not have the strength.¹⁴

On the 22 September the Estonian Rifle Corps took Tallinn.¹⁵ The People's Commissariat for Agriculture also returned to Tallinn. Paul Rahno, who had become head of the cadre department for the Commissariat, asked me to come back to work as senior economist. A few weeks later I passed the entrance examinations to the Tartu University Faculty of Medicine. As 12th on the list, I qualified for a scholarship. My dream had come true. Studying was more interesting than going to work, and I earned good grades. One day the professor of histology, Prof. Aunap called me in and said he had been observing me for some time, and thought I would make a good assistant. I could study and work on the side. At that time the Faculty of Medicine was virtually emptied of instructional staff. The war, along with deportations, mobilizations, arrests, and flight abroad, resulted in a serious shortage of instructors. I gave my silent consent, though the area of specialization did not particularly interest me.

¹³ Otto Tief, see Glossary and the life story of Hilja Lill.

¹⁴ Pitka's boys, Finnish boys, see Glossary.

¹⁵ Estonian Rifle Corps, see Glossary.

In the middle of May I heard that they had begun to arrest members of my former orchestra in Tallinn. My turn came on 5 June 1945. They came for me in the middle of the night at my apartment and took me to the KGB Headquarters on Riia Street. My heart was heavy, and I remember praying, "Father, You know and understand, I can only hope in You." After that they put me in a shed for two days and nights. We were not given anything to eat. A few times a day they would open the door a crack and hand us a sharp-edged can of water, which we tried to share among ourselves in a spirit of brotherhood. Two days later I was transferred to a larger room in the cellar, where there were already 20–30 men. There was not enough air. We were in a cold sweat. There was a leaky herring can in the corner for a latrine. I was taken there hungry and thirsty, and was not even given the daily bread ration of 250 g, since I had not been officially listed in that cell. They had just been distributing bread to the others. When had I last had something to eat, asked a fellow prisoner, in full earshot of the others. He was a forestry student, whom I had never seen before. He took his little piece of bread, broke it in half and handed the other half to me, leaving only 125 g for himself. The men who had large food bags from home pretended not to notice anything.

At night the interrogations and beatings went on and on. My first interrogator, Zeiger, stood behind me during the interrogation snapping and clicking his pistol. This was probably meant as a psychological pressure tactic. One time he struck me across the head with his pistol. The second interrogator was Kalikov, who had a reputation for cruelty since 1941 in Petseri county. His favorite tactic was kicking. The night before 19 June three men were called out of the cell: Tartu school inspector Looga, professor Paul Ariste,¹⁶ and the 21-year-old medical student Heljut Kapral. It was clear that we were to be sent somewhere. We were ordered to walk toward the station. It was a hard journey, since Looga had phlebitis in one leg and a fever. He could hardly move. In the station we were shoved into an old empty passenger car. Ariste and I sat opposite each other; Looga was lying down in the next compartment. A few hours later the train began to move toward Tallinn. Ariste and I chatted. Morning was coming. There was light in the eastern sky. I thought quietly about my sad birthday. At

¹⁶ Paul Ariste (1905–1990), linguist and folklorist, head of the Faculty of Finno-Ugric Languages at Tartu University, 1946–77.

home they already knew that I had been arrested, but of course they could not guess that I was so near them on the morning of my birthday. When the train had gotten as close as possible to Kamariku farm, Prof. Paul Ariste suddenly asked me, "How old are you, anyway?" I replied, "Today, on the 19th of June, at 4:30 AM I turned 22." I told him everything. He rummaged in his small prison bundle, pulled out a little piece of soap and said "I haven't got anything better. Let this be your birthday present, and know that it is heartfelt." To this day that has been one of my most precious birthday gifts. That morning around 8 o'clock we got to Tallinn and we went on foot to Pagari Street. The officer went in, the three of us were left standing on a corner near the Oleviste Church Tower. My former place of employment, the People's Commissariat of Agriculture was just across the street. My former co-workers were just arriving at work. Many noticed me, but out of fear turned their faces aside.

I spent two weeks in the pretrial prison on Pagari street. In the neighboring cell at the same time was Olympic wrestling champion Kristjan Palusalu.¹⁷ I have no idea where they had put Ariste and Loo-ga. One day I was lined up with 30–35 other prisoners in the inner courtyard of the Pagari prison. We were tightly packed into a prison vehicle and 15 minutes later found ourselves in the yard of the Patarei Prison.¹⁸ The cell was barely 3.5 meters wide.

There was a strict regimen in the cell. The newcomer was put next to the common latrine pail, used by the whole cell. I was lucky that there were many new men in the cell that day. The majority had a university education. I remember the cell elder Normann, engineers Nõmm, Veiserik, and Heidelberg, and doctors Allpere and Kandima, sculptor Eller, newspaper owner Saksen, a submarine captain from the Independence Era, and other well-known figures. In order to fight boredom, each evening a schedule of activities was put together for the next day, usually consisting of lectures and discussions. My assignment was to familiarize my cellmates with the basic principles of making an atomic bomb, since I had just passed my examinations in physics and chemistry. Sometimes we sang together quietly. The rest of the time was for thinking one's own thoughts or for conversing with one's neighbor. What I can still

¹⁷ Kristjan Palusalu, Olympic wrestling champion with 2 gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics; see also Raimo Loo's life story.

¹⁸ Patarei prison, see Glossary.

remember about Patarei was how we shaved using a piece of glass, and how we made needles from a piece of bone salvaged from our soup, also using a piece of glass. Several times I got packages—those were lovely moments. After the evening roll call a regular feature of the daily schedule was mutual delousing. I, too, was lice-ridden within a few days. In Patarei Prison I was only interrogated once, by a Russian named Nikiforov. For the first time an interpreter was provided. Nikiforov was polite and reasonable. It seemed that his responsibility was the preparation of the file for the tribunal, and there was already plenty of material.

One day they brought Johannes Kaarep into the cell—an older man, agronomist by trade, and widely known among the people as a prophet. Already on the first evening he invited his cellmates to join him in prayer. Thus we had prayer sessions together every morning and evening. Many of Kaarep's prophecies had been fulfilled. Before the end of the Republic, President Päts had summoned him, but Kaarep had said it was already too late. Repentance should have happened much earlier. One day Kaarep said he had gotten orders from God to write to Stalin, warning him about his terrible deeds, predicting that if he did not repent, the Soviet regime would come to an end. He handed his letter over to the prison guard.

On 21 November 1945 I was called out of the cell. Eleven of us musicians accused of treason were taken to stand trial before the Military Tribunal of the Tallinn Garrison. What happened there was purely a formality. The sentences had been decided ahead of time. It was a closed session, and there was no defense attorney. At the end they gave each of the accused an opportunity to make a closing statement. I and one other orchestra member spoke, the others did not bother. We were sentenced to ten years in prison camp followed by five years of resettlement, a relatively mild verdict for that time.

One day at the end of November we were outside for our walk. Someone tried to make contact with those walking in the adjoining yard. The prison guard standing above thought I was one of those talking. I was immediately put in solitary confinement, under the blacksmith's shop in the old prison, where it was cold, dark, and damp. I was stripped down to my undershirt. Shoes and socks also had to be turned over. The little cell had a cement floor, and there was a bench next to the back wall, half a meter wide and made out of narrow wooden slats. The slats were too narrow, so sitting was uncomfortable, but the bench was too short to lie down on. A few

hours later I got a companion, an agronomist named Õun, with whom we spent seven days and nights. It was cold, and I was hungry. We got 300 g of bread a day, accompanied only by cold water. Õun was smart, witty, and of an optimistic temperament. Not a word of complaint out of him. Sometimes we would sing together, as loudly as we could. One time Õun pounded his fists on the door, demanding that the prison guard immediately bring both of us a mug of warm beer. Scrunched together we could both fit on the bench, back to back, our knees drawn up under our shirts, face buried in the neck of the shirt. That way our breath could warm our whole body. Not for a minute did we want to stand on the ice-cold, wet floor. Even those seven days eventually came to an end.

On 10 December 1945 we were taken in the now-familiar prison van¹⁹ to the Lasnamäe prison, located on the Tartu Highway opposite the cellulose factory. At midnight on 13 December, about 800 men were driven out and lined up on the hillside opposite the cellulose factory in the middle of Tartu Road. After that everyone was ordered to kneel, so it would be easier to stop any escape attempts. We were surrounded by a thick wall of soldiers equipped with machinegun pistols, and ten or so specially trained dogs on chains. For me this forced kneeling became a real moment of prayer. A few hours later we were loaded onto cattle cars with double bunk beds.

Around noon on 17 December 1945 the gate to prison camp opened before us. We were deep in the woods in the northern district of Archangelsk *oblast*. The camp was surrounded by a high board fence, behind which there was a barbed-wire barrier several meters wide. Every 50 meters or so there was a watchtower with an armed soldier; between the towers, along the wires, ran guard dogs. Three brigades (75 men) were put in the same room. There were double bunk beds next to the wall on both sides to sleep on. Whatever clothes one had were to be used as bedding or a blanket. We were clad in old padded military uniforms; judging from the holes and bloodstains they had seen action. But this clothing was warm. As the camp had no electricity, the only light source in the barracks consisted of pine splinters. The starving and staggering creatures we saw around us forecast our future. Logging work began immediately. In the morning before dawn the “alarm clock” rang: banging with a metal stick on a hanging rail. For breakfast

¹⁹ The Stolypin prison van, known popularly as the “Black Crow.”

we got our daily bread ration, and in addition about 100 g of soy porridge (soy, with the oil pressed out, is generally used as animal feed). A long workday followed, struggling with trees, logs, and sticks, cold and hungry the whole time. Dead tired, we got back to the camp when it was already dark, ate our evening meal and fell into bed. And so it continued, day after day.

Christmas Eve arrived. One man succeeded in bringing a small fir tree into the camp. When the evening procedures were completed and roll call was over, we pulled the fir tree out from under the bunk and tied it to the post. Miraculously, one of my fellow prisoners had a Christmas candle, which we fastened to the tree. We had everything we needed outwardly to begin our Christmas celebration. We lighted the candle, extinguishing the pine splinters. The men sat on the edges of their beds. Schoolteacher Luming, from Mustvee, officiated at our Christmas service, which began with a quietly sung carol, and continued with a Christmas sermon. It was something extraordinary and very moving. We were all far away from our homes, but in our thoughts we were with our loved ones. We knew that they were thinking about us as well. We were like a family there, assembled before God's face. Most of the men had tears in their eyes. After the sermon we began singing "Silent Night," which I have always thought was the most beautiful Christmas carol. But then, unexpectedly, the door was pounded open. Out of the steam that poured in from the door appeared the figure of the middle-aged prison guard, carrying a club a meter long, demanding at the top of his lungs, "What is going on here?" Despite our fear we continued singing. We knew that what we were doing was strictly forbidden. Under our very eyes this loud fellow began to thaw. He grew quiet, took his hat off, and sat down on the edge of a bunk. It seemed that his soul, too, had started to chime in.

Logging work was overwhelmingly hard. The men weakened by the day. Until the following summer no permission was given to receive packages. As I lay on my bunk I thought, if only just once I could get enough bread to fill my stomach. The situation was practically hopeless. Would my health hold up? I thought it over a little and concluded, I have my God, and I am His child. I have a mother at home who is praying, and the congregation is praying for me. This knowledge was a great source of strength for me.

At the beginning of summer, 1946, I received my first package. It contained this and that to eat, a warm woolen vest and, at the bottom

of the package, a small New Testament. It was a complete miracle that this had escaped the notice of those who checked packages. Packages were opened right under their owner's nose, cans and bottles were pried open, and poked through with a rod. On Sundays we would gather around my bed to read the New Testament. Those listening included Theodor Mannik (former department head at the Estonian Bank), Herman Lipp (former county supervisor in Järva), Edgar Kalder (agronomist from the People's Commissariat of Agriculture). The main responsibility of our camp was chopping wood and sawing railroad ties. We worked the length of a new railway. One summer morning in 1947, I was ordered to return to the barracks. The prison guard followed me—I walked ahead, he behind; we walked along the railroad back to the old camp and from there immediately to the camp hospital. I was shown the place where I would be living, as well as a bed; only then did they bother to explain that I had been assigned the responsibility of orderly and night watchman. The last orderly was to be released in three weeks. Consequently, I had a good opportunity to acquaint myself with my new responsibilities. With interest I learned the available remedies that were being used, how to prescribe them, how to give injections, how to lance, as well as other ordinary procedures. Among my responsibilities were night watches and inspecting the kitchen in the mornings, taking food samples, and giving permission for its distribution, which was a task that quite agreed with me. As a result I was able to eat my fill early in the day.

I quickly got used to my new responsibilities. The majority of the hospital procedures and the distribution of remedies twice a day were left to me. I was on duty every night. One night there was a knock on the outside door of the hospital. A voice from behind the door asked me to come quickly to the barracks where *zarežali* was.²⁰ I grabbed a first-aid pouch, and headed immediately to the barracks he had indicated. It was quiet there; everyone was sleeping. In the middle of the barracks a candle was burning, and three young men were sitting around a table. They all stood up when I entered. The man in the middle announced ceremoniously, "We prepared meat for you, put it in a kettle if you wish. By morning we will make some more." There was a bloody axe in front of them on the table. Between the bunks lay their brigadier, five deep axe-wounds in his head. I bound the wounded man's

²⁰ "The cut one."

head with a gauze bandage and we took him on a stretcher to the hospital, where he died a few hours later. The murderers had demanded that the brigadier provide them with higher food rations at the expense of the others' work, without doing any additional work themselves. The second intended victim barely escaped with his life. Now it was clear to me that the word *zarezal* had a much more serious meaning than I had thought.

In July 1948 another unexpected event took place. We were ordered to come out of the barracks with all of our things. I turned over my work in the hospital, took my suitcase and got in line. After the formal warning that they would shoot at any provocation, the camp gates were opened and we stepped out, accompanied by an armed convoy. A row of cattle cars was loaded up with prisoners and began to move. Whenever the train happened to stop in a station, women would approach, despite the warnings of the convoy, and hand us bread or cigarettes through the barred windows. The common people empathized with our unfortunate fate. About 10 days after our departure the men started to complain of stomachaches. Our car had caught dysentery. It did not pass me by, either. There was no medical attention, and thus we all arrived, ill, in Krasnojarsk. There we were put in a transit camp, where there was also dysentery. The walls of the barracks were full of bloody mucus-filled excrement. A few weeks later they started to load us onto ferries, ordinarily used to haul coal or nickel ore, which stood in the river harbor. These had been furnished with three-level bunk beds. Before boarding the ferry, everyone was relieved of their personal belongings. When the ferry was fully loaded with prisoners, we started to move with the current of the Jenissei toward the Arctic Sea, dragged by a tugboat.

At the end of August, fall had already arrived on the Jenissei, and the surroundings were very lovely and colorful. When we reached the Dudinka River harbor, the railway departure point for Norilsk, we had already crossed the Arctic Circle, and were on the 68th meridian. The bundles taken away from us in Krasnojarsk were set on fire before our very eyes. In my suitcase was the warm underwear, the sweater, many pairs of woolen socks, all sent from home—and my New Testament. The convoy accompanying our ferry had most likely rummaged through our bundles and taken some things for themselves. In order to cover their tracks, everything had to be burned. Then we were all stripped naked. I most regretted the loss of the New Testament. The

journey to Norilsk took place by freight train. Upon arrival in our “next home,” everyone was subjected individually to thorough questioning. In addition to ordinary workers, many different kinds of specialists were needed, all of which were in short supply in Norilsk. I registered myself as a medical student and an experienced orderly. A few days later I was assigned to work in the camp hospital.

Camp No. IV with its 11,000 political prisoners was part of the national system of special-regime camps. There were prisoners from all over Asia and Europe, many from western Ukraine, Poland, Germany, the Baltic countries, China, Korea, etc. We no longer had names. I was prisoner G-971. Our camp numbers were written in large, legible letters on our outer clothing. We were allowed to send only two letters a year, and could only receive two in return. Any additional letters were simply thrown away.

Doctors and other medical personnel were brought in from other camps to the central hospital of the camp network. There were university professors from medical faculties, scientists, high-ranking specialists. The director of the surgery department was a faculty member from Prague University. Dr. Margulis, the Kremlin doctor accused of murdering M. Gorki, worked as a therapist in the same hospital. Professor Bogoslovski of the Leningrad Military Academy of Medicine had kept up his ties with academician Orbel, who sent us the latest in medical literature. There was a great deal of work, all of it very interesting. I used my few moments of free time to read medical literature. For me these were ideal circumstances for study and practice under the direction of top specialists. I was able to be of help to a large number of ill fellow prisoners. The hospital doctors held to a high ethical standard. As the years went on, my work responsibilities expanded. I was entrusted with curing patients on my own, without supervision.

At the end of 1952, I was transferred to another large camp network in Norilsk, where there was a shortage of medical personnel. Life here was completely different from previous camps because here there were mainly common criminals, many of them repeat offenders. Three main subgroups had emerged: the real thieves (*blatnoi*), those who had violated “thieves’ rules,” (*suka*), and simple workers (*muzhiki*). The first two of these were pitched in a life-and-death battle. The third, the camp’s primary labor force, tried to remain neutral. Working in that camp was in a way a “school of life.” One day I asked a seven-time murderer whether those “dead souls” did not trouble his conscience.

He replied, “definitely not.” The first murder had been spiritually the most difficult. He had crept up behind his chosen victim at work and hit him with his axe as hard as he could. It had been difficult to pull his axe out of the murdered man’s back. At that moment he had felt pain and regret. From then on it all got easier.

In the camp there were stringent unwritten “thieves’ rules” and a strict hierarchy. The highest “authorities” were above doing any work at all. They even had bodyguards. There were many notorious criminals in our camp, whose reputation extended across the whole Soviet Union. They moved large sums of money around in the camp. Card playing was in fashion. In many cases people even bet on their lives, and upon losing the death sentence was sometimes even carried out. A prisoner with a 25 year sentence really had nothing to lose for another murder—the sentence was only extended back to 25 years. The murderer was chosen by drawing lots or cards. There was an unwritten rule in the camp that did not allow anyone to touch a simple worker or a doctor (*Muzhika i vratsa trogat nelzja*). Throughout all my years of camp, only once was an attempt made on my life. This happened during an evening dispensary hour. A young, strong, drunk man appeared at the door, carrying a large knife, and rushed toward me. I grabbed the stool from under me and hit him in the chest with it. After that the patients in the office captured him and took him away. The next morning, again during my office hours, the same man came in the door, accompanied by two others. He fell to his knees before me and asked me to show him mercy and forgive him. I forgave him, in the hearing of his witnesses. The man’s face began to shine, his life had been saved. If I had not extended my forgiveness, they would have killed him. When at the end of 1953, a decree was issued permitting the use of the death penalty in the camps in cases of murder, the killings ended immediately.

The death of Stalin in 1953 was a day of great celebration and shouting in the camps. Private citizens showed a sad and anguished face, women even wept. On 25 May 1954, I received a document from the camp director setting me free, and I was handed airline and railway tickets to travel back to Estonia. I said my goodbyes to the hospital staff and the patients. Carrying a small bundle, I stepped out of the camp gates. It was impossible to describe the feeling. But there was only one thought in my head—home, as fast as possible.

On the morning of 1 June 1954, the thermometer at Norilsk airport showed minus 22 Celsius; at noon, when arriving at Krasnojarsk,

it was already plus 29 C, which seemed like southern heat. Sweat ran in streams. This was followed by the train journey Krasnojarsk–Moscow and Moscow–Tallinn. I planned first to go to my mother at Kilt-si, where she was now living alone. Grandmother and Grandfather had died while I was away; my sister had gotten married. When I got off the train and heard Estonian spoken, it sounded so mild and so lovely I could hardly hold back my tears. Mother said, “I knew you would come back, because I prayed so much for it.” There seemed no end to the conversation. A few days later I went to Tallinn to see what would happen next. Since as a released political prisoner, I was not allowed to live or work in the major cities such as Tallinn, Tartu, Narva, Kohtla-Järve or Pärnu, I had to find a job elsewhere. Finally, I found myself a position as laboratory worker in the Tapa District Hospital, replacing someone who had gone on maternity leave. The head doctor was a Party member, a brave, enterprising, smart Russian woman. In the Tapa district executive committee the question had been raised whether it was appropriate to hire such a politically “tainted” person. Dr. Bolshova took personal responsibility, and everything was solved. Unfortunately, I had no certificate of training, in order to receive the appropriate wages. Then the opportunity came to begin my studies in the distance-learning track in the medical assistant’s division in the Tartu Medical School, while continuing to work in the laboratory at Tapa. The academic year began on 1 September. This joy did not last long. At the end of 1 December I received a letter from the Tartu Medical School stating that I had been exmatriculated because of my political inappropriateness. My heart was heavy and I was very worried.

Soon amnesty was declared, and this applied to me as well, opening the way to Tartu University. But soon new obstacles emerged. High school diplomas from the German occupation era had by now become obsolete. The only way was to graduate from high school as an extern. There were new curricula in the high schools. I began my studies in January 1956; in May the exams for externs began. I had to pass examinations in 15 subjects in the high school curriculum, and four additional examinations along with the graduating students. I was able to take the university entrance exams in August of the same year in the general pool. I was a medical student once again.

A love that had lasted for two years burned with a strong flame. In January 1957, I married Tapa District Hospital otolaryngologist, Dr.

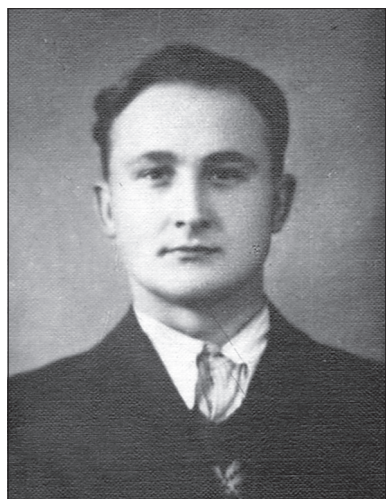
Vaike Tammiste, who supported my studies in every way. I was only able to visit my home in Tapa two weekends a month. In October 1957, to our great delight, twin daughters were born, Tiina and Maris. I am proud of my capable wife, who took care of the family while carrying a full workload, in a town some distance away, when I was not there to share the load. After an increase in my university scholarship, I was able to manage everyday life in Tartu without additional resources. My studies were interesting and proceeded without difficulty, and I read a great deal on the side. But life brought new and serious worries. In the middle of the first semester of my fourth year, the Party Secretary of the medical faculty, an instructor in the military faculty named Metsetin, began to make trouble for me on account of my religious beliefs. I changed the topic of conversation to dialectical materialism, which he was not so confident in, so he did not accomplish what he aimed for. He had proposed to the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine that a reason be found to expel me, but Professor Linkberg had the courage to stand up to that order. During the December examination period a man named Makarov was the examiner in historical materialism. I could do nothing else but pound historical materialism into my head and pray. When the appointed day arrived, I had to stay in my dormitory waiting for my turn, and appear immediately when summoned. I waited nervously. It was almost impossible to study under this kind of stress. I waited and waited, but the summons never came. The next morning I went to the historical materialism examination. Makarov called three students in to prepare themselves, myself among them. He went out himself and stayed away for almost two hours. Where he had been, no one could guess. This was a suspiciously long period for preparation. When he returned, he proceeded quickly to examine us, as was his usual custom. I knew the questions on my ticket well, but the collateral questions were completely different. I knew why they were necessary. He sent me out and ordered me to return in the afternoon. When I returned he took my matriculation booklet and marked in it the grade of “four” without comment. I was used to “fives” but at this point I was very happy with the grade.

Later I was given the full story. The night before the three of us were to meet Metsetin fell ill with severe stomach cramps. He had screamed in pain, fearing for his life, and summoned Prof. Linkberg, who diagnosed acute appendicitis and operated immediately. Later I could see that his attitude toward me had changed practically

overnight. He even gave me a grade of 5 in military training, without posing a single question.

In the spring of 1962, I graduated from the Faculty of Medicine. My dear wife, my four-year-old twin daughters, and my mother had come to the university auditorium to congratulate me with flowers. The rector only gave diplomas personally to those students who graduated with honors, and I was one of them. As I turned back from the presidium table, my little daughters in white dresses ran up to me with flowers, and there was strong applause from a roomful of people. This was an extraordinary moment for me. I had finally finished university, though there had been many seemingly insurmountable obstacles along the way. I know that here, too, God had helped me. Finally, we could be together as a family. In 1964, our third daughter, Siiri, was born. In the first year I worked in the Tapa District Hospital as a therapist and laboratory director, from 1963–1976 as laboratory director in the Estonian Railway Workers' Hospital, while also serving for many years as chief specialist in laboratory medicine for the Baltic Railway. From 1976–95, I worked in the Estonian Seamen's Hospital as assistant chief physician in diagnostics. On 1 June 1981, I defended my candidate's dissertation on chronic nonspecific lung diseases. Presently, I am working part-time as chief specialist in laboratory medicine for the Tallinn Health and Social Welfare Administration. Outside of work hours I have been president of the Estonian Laboratory Physicians' Society for the past seven years, and from 1991–1995 chairman of the board of the newly founded Estonian Association of Christian Physicians.

There has always been a special place in my life for my home and family. This has been like an inexhaustible well, where I have drawn strength for work and life, as well as a rich supply of joy and happiness. Our home has been rich in love, mutual understanding, and sense of belonging. Our greatest wealth is our three daughters, our fine sons-in-law, and 12 grandchildren. Nothing in this life could give me greater joy.



Hans Karro

BORN 1923

Estonian boys who had come of age on the brink of the Second World War had no way of anticipating that most of them were already destined for death, like Briar Rose in the well-known fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm. Only a miracle could save them. I, too, belonged to that unfortunate generation.

My name is Hans Karro. I was born on the Day of the Innocents in 1923 near Põltsamaa, in the village of Võhma-Nõmme at Palgimäe farm. My childhood and adolescence were no different from that of an ordinary rural boy of that time. After completing the six-grade elementary school at Põltsamaa, I obeyed my father's wish and stayed at home. As the family's only son, I was to prepare to take over my father's responsibilities as farm owner. Our farm was large and prosperous enough to acquire a tractor and other modern farm equipment. We employed Polish farm workers as hired hands, and through conversation with them the farm children quickly became fluent in Russian.¹ Farm children and paid farmhands worked side by side, and were on equal footing.

In the crisis year 1940, our farm was declared to "belong to the people," and most of it was divided among three "new landowners." Fifteen out of eighty hectares were left to the former owner, of which only 9.3 hectares were arable land. The tractor was confiscated, along with all the other farm equipment. My father clearly understood that from this point on a farmer could no longer count on being established

¹ Polish farm workers: due to poor economic conditions in their homeland, Polish farmhands were a relatively frequent sight in Estonia in the time of the Estonian republic.

and wealthy, so that fall he allowed me to continue my studies in the so-called supplementary class at the Põltsamaa Progymnasium.² I remember what a delight this was for me—to start on my way to school in the mornings in the company of my two sisters, instead of driving to the dairy with heavy milk containers or walking behind the spring-plow under the burning sun.

During my two years away from school, there were some things I had forgotten, but this did not cause me particular difficulties. I was two years older than my classmates, and more mature in many ways; I could manage my time better. So I began to study the flute in the school orchestra under the direction of Ants Kiilaspea. When the supplementary class was combined with the regular class the following fall, I was chosen class elder. Those school years have remained in my memory as the most beautiful time of my life; my intellectual abilities were blossoming, and I experienced the unforgettable intoxication of first love. After all, at the time I resumed my studies, I was seventeen years old.

The next year, in the summer of 1941, the war began. The boys in the upper grades were mobilized into the Red Army, and many of them we never saw again. The front held near Põltsamaa for fully two weeks; drunken Red Army soldiers and members of the Latvian destruction battalions³ looted the surrounding farms. My sisters and the neighbors' girls were forced to disguise themselves as old women to stay alive. All around us there was death, destruction, and weeping.

When the fighting finally died down, the Germans brought with them a new regime and new laws. My father got his land and farm equipment back. To replace the horse the Russians had forcibly taken from us we were given a huge, wounded Ardennes horse from the German army; instead of Polish farmhands, there was a Ukrainian war prisoner named Grigori. In his civilian life he had been a teacher of Russian language and literature. I gained a friend and an incomparable Russian language teacher.

Considering that the times were uncertain, the future even more so, my father no longer expected me to interrupt my education and come back to the farm. In the fall I continued my studies at Põltsamaa with my sister Aino. The war made its presence felt at school: instead

² Class for adult students to complete their education.

³ Destruction battalions, see Glossary.

of notebooks we used office account books, and wrote on the backs of pages. We had no textbooks, either, but with good will it was possible to teach and learn a great deal.

Thus two years of war went by. Until that point young men had been urged to become volunteers in the German Army or the Estonian Legion,⁴ but no direct pressure had been exerted. However, in October 1943, under pressure from the Germans, the Estonian Local Administration declared a compulsory mobilization of all men born in 1925. Though I had been born in 1923, my *Ausweis* issued by the occupation forces mistakenly bore the birth date 1925, and so I was under mobilization orders. When I went to inquire at the town hall, it was retorted that according to my real birth date I should have been in the army long ago. It was clear that Germany, worn out by a long war, simply needed fresh cannon fodder; it was also abundantly clear that Estonian boys like us had nothing to do with the quarrel between two great world powers, neither one of whom had the slightest interest in the fate of small nations. What were we supposed to do? I made contact with the Forest Brothers, but with winter coming they did not recommend hiding in the forest. Besides, the occupation forces had threatened that mobilization evaders would be summarily shot without trial wherever they were caught. Either way, death awaited. The solution to the Chinese riddle came from an unexpected direction. A few days before the deadline for mobilization we had a visit from my mother's brother Eduard Roos, who lived in Tallinn, and who later became a literary historian researching ancient Estonian names. He told us that he had joined a secret movement headed by Captain Karl Talpak to evacuate Estonian schoolboys illegally to Finland. He asked me whether I would be willing to become a volunteer in the Finnish army. If so, he would take me, along with a trustworthy classmate of my choice, across the Gulf of Finland for a reduced price, that is for 500 Ostmark instead of the usual 3,000. How could a drowning man not grab hold of the rope that is thrown to him! That same evening I relayed the message to my benchmate,⁵ and the next morning I stopped the first passing military

⁴ Estonian Legion, see Glossary.

⁵ The benchmate, the classmate one sits next to, usually over a period of several years, has a special significance; regardless of the amount of time spent together outside of school, he or she is counted among one's closest circle of personal friends. The high school benchmate usually remains a friend for life.

vehicle with the question, would they be willing to take us along to Tallinn. The answer was, *Jawohl, bitte schön*. It would take too long to describe the week of anxious waiting at my uncle's apartment, the dangerous ride under cover of darkness to Salmistu beach, and three days and nights of oscillating between hope and despair, until finally a cloudier, less windy night arrived, along with the boat we had been waiting for.

On the morning of 13 November 1943, after a few hours of "feeding the fish" over the side of the boat, six Põltsamaa boys finally arrived on the Finnish shores on the tiny island of Pirtti. For a few more weeks we were subjected to police investigation and medical examinations, completing paperwork and receiving military supplies. Then we were taken by military railway to the Porokylä training center near the village of Nurmes. There was a stark contrast between the severity of the Finnish military officers and the strikingly warm attitude of the civilian population. We were surprised by invitations for home visits, and schoolgirls sent us food packages along with requests to begin correspondence. Eeva, my pen pal from Jyväskylä, asked that I send her as many addresses from our regiment as possible, so that there would be no fights over boys in the classroom.

Before the Christmas holidays I happened to meet a local farmer in the woods near our barracks, who invited me along with a few friends to light the Christmas candles and drink coffee with his family on Christmas Eve. We became acquainted with the Seppä family from Kurvila, and their beautiful daughter Hanna. When we left that warmhearted Christmas gathering, the father shook hands with us, saying that of course from here on we should consider ourselves at home there, since we had come all the way across the gulf to defend their homes. We went back there often to chat, and when we were sent to the front a half-year later, I left all of my excess belongings including my violin, my diary, and my books with Hanna for safekeeping. It was not until 46 years later that I was to see the blue-eyed daughter of the Kurvila family again.

The dreaded three months of basic training were followed by specialized training. Boys with musical inclinations and a well-developed sense of rhythm were sought after as radio operators. Since I had brought my flute and my violin along to the army, and had frequently performed at soldier's evenings, I found myself at the signal corps training centre at Järvenpää. Life was quite a bit easier here, and there

was less drill. The most important thing was practicing Morse-code (radio-squeaks) in order to pass the weekly tests. Those who failed were sent back to the telephone unit, among the so-called “wire-tails.” Life was far less pleasant there, due to constant outdoor training. After three months we took the radio operators’ examinations, and after a few weeks of practical exercises we were ready to be sent to the front. It was midsummer, 1944, and the major Russian offensive had just begun on the Karelian peninsula and the Wiborg front. The Finnish Army Central Command directed all available military forces including the Estonian infantry division JR200 to the places where the front had broken through. Twenty or so radio operators were considered too many for one regiment, so I was issued a bicycle and assigned to be a battle courier, maintaining communication between the Estonian and Finnish regiments.

Unexpectedly, during the most critical battles, peace talks began between Finland and the Soviet Union. Our regiment was given the choice of remaining temporarily in Finnish military service, or returning to Estonia to continue the fight for our own country’s freedom. By then the situation had changed completely, and the Red Army had invaded Estonia for a second time. Should the situation that prevailed at the brink of the War of Independence (1918–1920) recur, and should Estonia seize the opportunity to become independent, we would be sorely needed in our homeland. Barely a tenth of our regiment, mostly the older, cool-headed men, chose to remain in Finland. And so it happened, that 10 months after fleeing Estonia from the Germans, the German warship “*Wartheland*” brought us back to our homeland.

One of our two battalions, the first, was taken immediately to the Tartu front at Tartu, and the other to the Kehra area for further training. I belonged to this second group. Nothing particularly useful came from the training, since we refused to comply with commands in the German language, and refused to trade our Finnish uniforms for German ones. A few days before Tallinn was taken, our entire Second Battalion was taken into the foxholes to defend the Maardu-Lagedi line against the attacking eastern enemy. Apparently, the Germans did not trust our rebellious unit very much, for soon we received marching orders to Tallinn harbor, where a ship awaited to take us to Germany. All of us refused, officers as well as soldiers. There were fights with the Germans, as well as exchanges of fire, with casualties on both sides. When it finally became clear that the Russians were attacking Tallinn

from the south we had no equipment or ammunition to oppose them. The commanding officers of our battalion dismissed us, and we were left to find our own way out of the situation.

I was now a free man like Prince Gabriel,⁶ and started cautiously making my way back to Põltsamaa. In out-of-the-way farms in the woods I traded my military uniform piece by piece for civilian clothes. Of course, I also had to leave behind my weapons and my Finnish soldier's backpack. In exchange for these, a trusting farmer gave me a rake to sling over my shoulder. Near Koigi I was caught by Russians who were combing the forests, but my good knowledge of Russian and the "proof of employment" on my shoulder allowed me to pass as a local who was helping with the haying. After a week's journey through enemy-occupied Estonia, I was finally back home, alive and well. Home—in the same predicament as a year before. As the son of the owner of a large farm, and having fought on the opposite side, it would have been crazy to turn myself over to the enemy. I found myself a well-concealed hiding place. I felt no boredom, since I began intensively studying English, German, and Swedish, in hopes of someday escaping west. My sisters provided me with study materials, and the whole family got busy spreading the rumor that I had safely made it to Sweden. Later, when the real Red terror began, with its massive round-ups, I slipped from my hiding place to an out-of-the-way farm in the woods; in the summer, I withdrew into distant corners of the forest in order not to put those sheltering me in danger.

After two years in hiding my health gave out: I had a fever, my cheeks burned, and my ears rang. It was even risky to cough, because the "new landowners"⁷ living in our house would hear. Help came from my mother's older brother, teacher and book collector Jaan Roos, who at that time was himself on the "wanted list" and in hiding.⁸ Due to his large circle of friends and acquaintances, he enabled me to get treatment at the small Kursi hospital, under a false name of course. The diagnosis was acute lung infection. A month of treatment yielded

⁶ *Vaba nagu vürst Gabriel* (popular saying from Eduard Bornhöhe's 19th century novel, quoted in the 1969 cult film "The Last Relic.").

⁷ New Landowners, see Glossary.

⁸ Five volumes of Jaan Roos' diaries from the years 1944–45 have been published since 1997, with the title *Läbi punase öö* (Through the Red Night). Roos was director of the Tartu Girls' Gymnasium (founded 1919), at the corner of Riia and Kalevi Streets, from 1923–1936.

no particular results. What would happen next? Should I go back to my damp, unheated hiding place? The Kursi pharmacist, one of J. Roos' former students named Helga Nõmmeots, found an obliging person among her large clientele who was willing to take me in temporarily at her home in Puurmani.

Mrs. Maare Orav had a daughter and three underage sons. She herself worked in the forest district, and her 20-year-old daughter in the local shop. The father of the family had been shot during the German occupation. I was given a bed in the boys' room. Both women spread the rumor among friends and neighbors that I was Harri Raag, their ailing relative from the oil-shale region, who had been advised by the doctor to change his place of residence because of a chronic lung condition. My unusually pale and thin appearance, and the burning cheeks in the evenings were ample evidence for this myth. It was impossible to hide completely in the headquarters of a forest district, where there were many apartments, but the neighbors politely kept their distance from the source of infection, and never tired of scolding Mrs. Orav for risking her health and the health of her children. I lived in that wonderful, friendly family for that entire fall and the following winter. I helped the boys with their homework, and Elsa, who had bibliophilic interests, with the binding and restoration of books. Elsa had a sweetheart among the Forest Brothers,⁹ whom she married after the 1947 amnesty. To some extent I may have been shielded by the fact that Elsa's friend Irene was flirting with the head of the local police, who apparently found my myth convincing.

In the spring of 1947, I succeeded in seeking treatment with the renowned Abaja village doctor, who went by the nickname Kõlmavee-Tõnu (Coldwater-Tõnu). I was now called Olaf Orav, as I had been furnished with Elsa's older brother's student identification card. Tõnu Kingsepp—Coldwater-Tõnu's real name—had an unofficial "healing center," where treatment consisted primarily of Sitzbaths and dousing the patient with cool water. These treatments were always followed by vigorous jumping around and jogging in a noisy circle of fellow patients. For some reason, the official powers showed little interest in this illegal hospital, though it was unusually popular among the people in surrounding villages. In my own opinion this was actually a kind of sanatorium, where simple rest and stress relief through jokes, laughter,

⁹ Forest Brothers, see Glossary.

song, playing musical instruments may have done more than the water cure. At any rate, in the course of a few weeks, all the symptoms of my illness had disappeared. Old Tõnu stroked his long mustaches, and suggested I give up my spot at the hospital to the next in line. That news did not cause me much of a headache, since, in the meantime I had discovered some distant relatives, the Roos family from Vähisoo, living in the nearby forest village of Merja, a stone's throw from the ancient Merja fortification.

Vähisoo-Arnold gladly accepted me into his family to convalesce. He worked as a cobbler in Rakke, and the farm badly needed able-bodied help. In that family there were a daughter and three sons, all minors. I became acquainted with almost all of the numerous relatives who lived in the area and with the Forest Brothers. Between them I had many places to spend the night. It was unbelievably heartwarming, how willingly people helped out those in trouble, at the risk of their own lives and freedom. Among the people in the forest there was little occasion to converse, and thus every visitor was greeted with a special warmth which would be hard to come by in cities and larger villages. The Vähisoo family was also deeply religious.

Every now and then I would visit the Abaja hospital to repay my debt of gratitude to the 83-year-old "water doctor" by providing firewood and doing repairs. I got to know one of the new patients, August Pung, a gardener from Rakvere, who was trying to get relief for his rheumatism. This friendly old man evidently began to figure out that all was not well with me. After my departure from the hospital, another patient had gone to Puurmani to visit Olaf Orav, and to his great amazement, had encountered the "real" Olaf there. It was of course my own unforgivable error to have mentioned that my home was at Puurmani. Rumors about that unsuccessful meeting quickly made their way back to the sanatorium, and August Pung started to pass hints that some Ingrians had succeeded in getting temporary passports at Rakvere without having to present a birth certificate. The point was that Ingrians, a Finno-Ugrian people whom the Germans had resettled in Estonia during the war, were automatically designated for deportation after the war to the remote far eastern¹⁰ regions of the Soviet Union. In order to escape this fate, the deportees attempted to marry Estonians or to deny their nationality. One way of doing this was to

¹⁰ "Russian Estonian," see Glossary.

obtain a temporary five-year passport. Since many local archives had been destroyed during the war, the requirement to present a birth certificate could not be rigidly enforced. I was fluent in both Finnish and Russian, what was to prevent me from being an Ingrian? Through the help of the Rakvere gardener I met an Ingrian who had just obtained a temporary passport, who helped me compose an application according to which I was Andres Tamm, an Estonian born in 1930 in the Ingrian village of Kirjamo, all of whose personal belongings, documents included, had been stolen in a train. But an unexpected problem arose at the passport application desk: in order for me to obtain a job and a place to live in Rakvere, additional documents were needed to prove my identity. With the help of August Pung's acquaintances, I was able to obtain the necessary papers quickly, and beginning 1 September 1948, the "newborn" Andres Tamm was registered as residing at 1 Kiriku Street in Rakvere, where there was also a felt boot factory. From that date on I was also officially designated as the director of that factory. In those days, the term "Russian Estonian" had almost magical powers as far as the selection of "cadres" was concerned. In the felt boot factory, felt footwear was manufactured on a made-to-order basis. The director's responsibility was to receive the wool and prepare order forms, to turn over the finished work, and prepare required reports for the Industrial Plant (*Tööstuskombinaat*). This work provided no insuperable difficulties for a young man with 9 grades of education, but of course, I had no certificate proving my level of education. In the biographical description and cadre evaluation form for Andres Tamm, it was recorded that I had completed 7 grades in the Kirjamo School for Worker's Youth. But where was I to find the required certificate, since after all I was a "leading worker"?¹¹ There was no way around it: I had to resume my studies that fall in eighth grade of Rakvere's High School No. 1, attending evening classes. I also began to take accordion lessons with Hans Hindpere, who at the time was working at the Rakvere Theatre. As mentioned before, I was born in 1923, but Andres Tamm was forced to wait seven more years to see daylight. Otherwise he would have had to have a military registration document, and it was well nigh impossible to obtain any such thing. According to my cadre evaluation form, Andres' father had fallen in the ranks of the Red Army, and his mother had perished during the Leningrad blockade. The poor orphan

¹¹ "Leading worker" see David Abramson's story.

had no surviving sisters or brothers; otherwise I would have had to provide official information about them as well.

Unfortunately, as active and interesting as it was, the Rakvere period in my life did not last very long. I was barely able to manage a year and half of peacefully going to work and school when an unexpected crisis occurred. At the insistence of the Industrial Plant director, Andres Kirjamäe, I had allowed felt footwear to be produced in the plant on the basis of fictitious orders, since there was a great demand for them at that time. The footwear was sold in cooperative shops and on the market with no official record, thus providing “black market cash” for the Plant to obtain “deficit” goods from Russia. In those days this was a well-known method for obtaining materials. In the early spring of 1950, a surprise government inspection was conducted, apparently as a result of a secret denunciation. Director Kirjamägi was arrested, and I, along with the saleswoman from the shop, was summoned for interrogation. They yelled at me, stuck me in a cell, called me back out again. All of this went on for 24 hours. They demanded that we denounce ourselves and the director for pilfering socialist property. In my fright I had anticipated questions about my previous jobs, which could have been grounds for investigation into my background. I was very lucky that the interrogators made two crucial mistakes: first, they showed no interest in finding out how such a young man could have been appointed director of an industrial concern; second, they allowed me to make a quick trip home, to pick up the account books from my office. As soon as I got home, I took my few possessions to some friends for safekeeping, got on my bicycle, and after a few hours of pedaling through sleepy villages was back the next morning in my old, familiar Vähisoo.

In 1948, my parents had been declared *kulaks*¹² and debtors to the state. Fearing the arrest and deportation of my whole family, my parents and both of my sisters had fled to the home of the same Vähisoo relatives, where they were able to hide from the authorities until Stalin’s death in 1953. From that time on, I wandered over an even larger area than I had before. My Rakvere friends kept finding me new places to stay, though to the best of their knowledge I was an Estonian from Russia who was on the wanted list and subject to prosecution. It was not until the end of the year 1951, when more than a year and a

¹² *Kulaks*, see Glossary.

half had gone by since the Rakvere trial, and Director Kirjamägi had received his ten year sentence, that I withdrew my registration¹³ from Rakvere and went to live in Vasalemma. I got a job in the Architectural Restoration Workshop in Tallinn. The restoration of the Town Hall tower had begun, and for the mounting of the new spire they needed young men who were not afraid of heights. While we awaited the preparation of the tower scaffolding, which was being done on the ground near the St. Nicholas Church, we spent our time restoring the old city wall in the Danish King's Garden. In order to avoid traveling to Vasalemma every night, I created a small living quarters for myself in the Stable Tower. Since I played my flute every night in my little tower room, the neighbors started to call me the "ghost of the tower." This name had been given to me earlier by the painter Karl Burman senior, who lived in the Maiden's Tower (*Neitsitorn*), and asked me to pose for him occasionally. The whole next summer and autumn I worked up high in the wind and the sun, on the scaffolding of the spire. When the tower's trestle was up, Endel Tempel and I were the two youngest members of the brigade who were given the task of taking Old Thomas up to the top of the tower. Then the office workers followed us. I struck up an accordion melody, and soon there was dancing on all levels of the scaffolding. Underneath Old Thomas in the copper dome, hidden inside a lead cylinder, are various relics, including a list of those who restored the tower. The name Andres Tamm is neatly inscribed alongside the others.

Life in Tallinn gradually got more interesting. The wages of a skilled worker were unheard of, over 300 rubles a month. By the autumn I had gotten myself a private room with some friends, but bit-by-bit the fateful day approached when my temporary passport would expire. The trouble was, a temporary passport could not be renewed without presenting a birth certificate. What would happen next? A very acceptable solution to this conundrum was unexpectedly delivered right to my doorstep. With the "birthdate" 1930, my name was on conscription list at the military commission at Keila, and in 1952 I was summoned to do my mandatory military service. I was to be stationed at the Juhkental signal battalion in Tallinn. It was an unanticipated trick of fate that I had to memorize the same "radio squeaks"

¹³ Soviet citizens had to be officially registered at a place of residence, and could only change their address with official permission.

for which I had passed the III level examinations eight years earlier. That was in Finland, wearing a different uniform, and on the other side of the frontlines. During the drill sessions I intentionally made errors, and pretended that I had never seen Morse code before, but it is hard to make an experienced radio operator's hand look clumsy. I was lucky that I was soon spared the trouble of putting on an act; due to my good knowledge of Russian and my calligraphic handwriting, I was appointed clerk for the training battalion. Around the same time the girls from the V. Klement Sewing Factory started to take folk-dancing lessons with the boys of our battalion. The instructors were Ott and Salme Valgemäe. Since I had my own accordion, I was asked to accompany the dancers. I had become a popular and useful soldier in my company, referred to by everyone as Tamme Andu.

In my second year of service I received the insignia of a lance corporal, and was promoted to supply manager for the signal corps. This was an even better position than the company office. I accepted the job, and started issuing signal equipment. I had direct contact only with the first sergeants in the company, and with the boys who repaired the signal equipment. I remained in that pleasant position through my third year of service, although I was offered a higher paying job in the company headquarters, and though Jaan Kääramees repeatedly invited me to play the flute in the orchestra. In the out-of-the-way warehouse I felt much safer.

This deceptive sense of safety collapsed like a house of cards when in the summer of 1955 an allotment of new infrared signal equipment was brought to my warehouse. These were considered top secret, so that all individuals who handled them were required to have a special access permit, a *dopusk*. To get the permit one had to fill out a form, and the information was checked by state security authorities. I filled out the papers with my imaginary data, though I was pretty sure that the game of hide-and-seek would not last much longer. About a month later a car was sent for me from the counterintelligence division at Toompea. The polite KGB major announced that the information in my application had not been confirmed, and that the people I had listed were not on record anywhere in the archives of the Leningrad *oblast*.¹⁴ I was asked to provide a letter of explanation for secondary investigation. I put this together right on the spot, rattling off as many

¹⁴ *Oblast*, district, see Glossary, under Soviet administrative districts.

place names as possible based on what I knew from the Ingrian fellow in Rakvere. This time I was allowed to return from Toompea, but from that time on I noticed that I was constantly being followed. I was no longer issued passes, and I was allowed no visitors.

On 10 September 1955, a car with barred windows was sent for me again. Now there was no trace of the politeness of the previous occasion. I was placed in a solitary cell, given a paper and pencil, and told that I would not get out of there until I had honestly confessed to everything. I decided to do this in such a manner that all those who had helped me and hidden me would be left out of the picture, except of course the members of my immediate family. When I had presented my letter of explanation, they laughed in my face, saying that they knew a lot more about me than that. I was instructed to think hard and call back to mind what responsibilities I had been assigned by the Finnish Intelligence Service, how I had wormed my way into the glorious Soviet Army, what criminal acts I had committed, etc. My closest relatives were brought in and set up to confront me. Even my bedridden mother was brought in on a stretcher to give testimony. But time itself was working in my favor. Stalin had been dead two years; Beria had been killed, and just that same year, 1955, a general amnesty had been declared. In short: matters were concluded in such a way that in November 1955, the lance corporal's insignia was removed from the epaulets of 24-year-old Andres Tamm, who was sent out from the gates of Juhkental as the 31-year-old demobilized Hans Karro, whose papers were entirely in order to boot.

With my changed name I did not dare return to my former place of work. With the help of the folk-dancing girls from the Klement factory I got a new job and living quarters in Tallinn provided that I agree to continue to play music for their ensemble. The next year I married Vilma, the sister of my battalion buddy Heino Kulla, whom I had gotten to know while playing in a string quintet. Two sons, Andres and Mihkel, were born two years apart. Life had finally taken a peaceful turn, but neither I nor my wife were satisfied, since I had only a grade nine education, my wife only grade seven. When in 1961 a republic-wide extramural high school was established in Tallinn in Kevade Street, we both submitted our applications for continuing our studies. I was 38 years old, my wife 31, and our younger son Mihkel was only a year and a half old at the time. Through conscientious study and examinations I was able to complete two grades in one academic

year, and to get my high school graduation certificate. This I submitted immediately to the Tallinn Polytechnic Institute, where I passed the admissions examinations for the evening division of the electrical appliances department. My wife continued her studies in the extramural high school a year at a time, until her graduation.

After six strenuous years of study, I graduated with distinction from the Tallinn Polytechnic Institute, and was invited to work in the electrical appliances division. For the first two years I was involved in scientific research, supplemented by a 50 percent teaching load. I continued to a full teaching load, and over the course of the first year completed the minimal requirements for the *kandidat* degree¹⁵ in three mandatory subjects, in order to start writing my dissertation. Unexpectedly, shadows from the past were cast over my progress. The research focus of our department was MHD technology, or, more simply put, molten metal pumps. After assembly at TPI, they needed to be tested, researched, and phased into the metallurgy industry throughout the Soviet Union. Once again, access permits were required by the state security apparatus. When I had submitted the required application to the TPI security division, or—according to its official designation, to Department I, I was asked to wait for a few days, but then my application was rejected: it was not possible to issue me such a permit. It was only then that I remembered that soon after being released from the Soviet Army, the KGB had made persistent attempts to recruit me as an informer. I had categorically refused, upon which the KGB officer had threatened me and said that I should never hope to get a permit to travel abroad, nor to do anything else that depended on them. Now the KGB was demonstrating an unbelievable level of activity. The next time I was at pump tests in a lead plant in Tshimkent, and asked for some data on metal production, quality, and export in that concern, the friendly shop foreman pulled me aside and said in a whisper that a phone call had come from a certain place warning them about me. I decided to stop banging my head against a wall. Besides, my health had started to suffer, most probably due to mental strain. For a long time I had suffered from insomnia and heart arrhythmias. One of my students invited me to work at the Estonian Energy Sales, where I was offered the position of director for a technical group in energy inspection. In this pleasant,

¹⁵ *Kandidat* degree, postgraduate degree in the Soviet system. In most cases, equivalent to the Ph.D.

low-stress job my health rapidly improved. I was involved in many interesting things, such as investigations of trauma due to electricity, lectures about electrical safety to citizens, translation and publication of instructional materials, etc. In this way, the last ten years of my working life passed until I retired in spring 1984.

With that I could complete my short, very concentrated life story, but fate still had some surprises in store for me. First, despite the KGB, I was able to go to Finland in 1990, along with the Academic Society for Military History, and there in Vironlahti, after 46 years, I saw Hanna from Kurvila again. She was now the mother of six children. She had heard about our war veterans' group excursion to old battlefields, and rushed to meet us at one of our stopping places, in order to give back to me, with many hugs, the things that she had kept for me all those years, mementoes of a soldier-boy from a kindred nation. From that time, I have been in lively correspondence with Hanna and her congenial husband.

That same year, I miraculously got back my father's "kulak farm" at Palgimäe. There had been a *kolkhoz* centre there in the meantime, and during recent years an unusual dormitory for *kolkhoz* workers. The director, the son of our former neighbor, transferred the last eight families out of our home, offering them acceptable apartments elsewhere. At the first available opportunity, I took my sons and their families and moved from Tallinn back to the farm, to restore it, and to till the land. My numerous Finnish friends have furnished me with almost all of the necessary farm equipment with the exception of a tractor and truck, which I had to obtain myself. The Palgimäe fields have fed us very well through these years, and so far there has been no need to take any loans. What more could a farmer want during these years of the rebuilding of the republic?

I am now 75 years old. My past life, with all of its escapades that ended more-or-less happily now seems like an old adventure film, which no longer concerns me. But when old friends come to visit, and one calls me Harri, another Olaf, Andu, or Hans, it makes me smile, and I reflect on what my six grandchildren know about their grandfather with an adventuresome past. What can today's young people know about war and death, repressions and the difficulties of life? I have no right to take the memories of our "death-sentence generation" with me to the grave. Thus I am happy that I have been given time to write down my reminiscences for those yet to come.



Hillar Tassa

BORN 1923

My story got started in Tartu on a Saturday morning, 10 February 1923, when an eight-and-a-half pound boy arrived in this wondrous world. Slowly my identity began to take shape: a little box of mandarin oranges under the Christmas tree, a leg gashed by a nail, a hand pounded by a hammer. Every once in a while my basic human rights were violated, most commonly with a leather belt.

In 1930 my father took me by the hand and we made our way to the smaller building of the Treffner Gymnasium.¹ Soon I had to trade Treffner in for the Viljandi Educational Society Gymnasium, and a few years later for the Viljandi County Gymnasium. Father's new job was at the Viljandi-Pärnu Regional Courthouse. For my tenth birthday I was given a pair of skis—very simple ones, with a pigskin strap that wrapped around the boot. Six years later I took first place in the county in ski-racing, but that was already a different pair of skis. Things went smoothly for me in school. My brains probably came from my father's side. He had graduated *cum laude* from Tartu University in Law. In the upper grades I tried to play tennis as well. In 1939 Viljandi sent a three-member youth team to the Estonian Games. We took second place to the Tallinn youth.

September 1939 came. On the first day of school the weather was very lovely—we ran and tussled in the wide school park. No one had

¹ Treffner Gymnasium, founded by Hugo Treffner in 1883 as a boys' *progymnasium* (four-year preparatory course for gymnasium), which acquired a legendary reputation in the era of the Estonian Republic. See also Glossary, Educational system.

any idea that war had broken out. My mother was the chairwoman of the Sakala Division of the Women's Defense League Auxiliary.² And through her, a whole nation's anguish pervaded our home. The tragic end came in the summer of 1940. Germany conquered Paris while the whole world watched. Under the shadow of that event, the Soviet Union brought its troops over the Estonian border on 17 June. On 19 June I was in Tartu at my uncle's wedding. There was an air of excitement in the streets; someone handed out small blue-black-and-white ribbons to passersby. I, too, adorned myself with one of these. In Üllejõe a group of men was strolling around, with a look in their eyes that made it clear what they thought of me. A few hundred curious people had assembled at Town Hall Square: in front of the Town Hall, a little bit to the left, stood a lorry with its sides shot off, with five to six people standing in back. Several of them had their heads shaved; they had just been let out of prison. Events took a rapid course. Already a new government had been set up; the Defense League had been disbanded, and weapons rounded up. I carried off a small-caliber carbine. The methods for changing the regime made no sense: the whole governmental structure was quickly dismantled, and coarse propaganda achieved results opposite to what was expected. Prominent figures, especially government officials, began to disappear. Defiant opposition arose to the new regime.

One of the most pleasant places to take an autumn stroll in Viljandi was the avenue leading from the Estonian Bank to the hills around the castle ruins. In the evenings students from our school and the girls' high school would promenade there. One evening, totally spontaneously, a group of boys from our class marched from the avenue to the square, past the War of Independence memorial, past the former "Police Castle," now headquarters for the militia (*militis*),³ toward the Valuoja ravine. The song "The Estonian Flag" rang out loudly. Everything turned out as badly as it possibly could: three policemen sprang out of the building, and, brandishing their pistols, herded the ten to twelve boys who had taken part in the parade right into the building. To head off the boys' escape through Valuoja ravine, all the policemen ran out to the steps at the end of the building. Taking advantage of the moment, I turned left, toward the façade of the building, and started

² Defense League Women's Auxiliary (*Naiskodukaitse*), see Glossary.

³ Soviet term for the police.

walking slowly along the length of the building toward the castle hills. When I got to the main entrance, where the door opened onto the front stairs, I saw a policeman looking around suspiciously at me and the immediate surroundings. Apparently, he had heard the pistol shots from the other end of the building. My “spring” was wound up to the final degree. But I held myself back and did not break into a run. The policeman calmed down as well and turned back toward the building. I lasted 20 meters longer until the bushes, and then tore off. The other boys were held until morning, and of course my name became known as well. The next day my appetite was very poor; I kept waiting for a summons. It never came. All of us were marked “deficient” in deportment on our next semester report card. In the spring, before high school final examinations, three of the marchers disappeared.

After my high school graduation I went to Tallinn to be with my father. Under the new regime he had been employed by the Housing Authority on Town Hall Square. The evening of 13 June we went to visit friends in Vasalemma. Father was agitated for some reason, and for no apparent reason handed me his gold pocket watch in the train corridor. In the next few days the reason was clear—the first deportations were taking place. It was as if Genghis-Khan was constantly breathing down our necks. Something Asiatic had invaded Europe. At the end of the first week of July, a classmate and I decided to bicycle south of Viljandi. The road was unusually deserted. We had ridden some five to six kilometers when, just before Sinialliku, two Russian soldiers leaped out of a ditch ahead of us. With a sharp gesture Sander threw his Finnish bowie knife into the ditch, hoping it would not be noticed. We were stopped and taken into the woods nearby where some of their company was bivouacked. One of the officers was cleaning his revolver, while we started in with our explanations. By this time the bowie knife tossed into the ditch had caught up with us, and a search of Sander’s pockets had yielded a Finnish 5 cent coin. I regretted the resistance I had shown to studying Russian during the past school year. Of course, the officer did not speak a single word of Estonian. Carrying a bowie knife was strictly forbidden in those days. We had no passports, but I had my driver’s license with a photograph in my pocket. This helped substantially, since boys with that birthdate had not yet been mobilized into the Russian Army. We may not have been deserters, but were we spies? Upon some reflection the officer made his decision: confiscate the knife, return the coin, let the boys go. We jumped

onto our bicycles, and flew down the hill to the opposite bank of Sini-alliku Lake. In the water our *joie de vivre* revived for some reason, so we shouted at the top of our lungs.

At that moment we did not realize yet that the curtain had gone up on the bloody performance of our generation's youth in the theatre of the Second World War. Only recently had we marched together in our scout and Young Eagles' groups,⁴ singing "The Estonian Flag" and "Death, Which Claims a Plentiful Harvest." We were prepared to die for our country's freedom, but when the time came to stand up for it, our leaders lacked the strength to sound the horn of battle. This fated us to fight in foreign wars, on both sides of the trenches. The line that separated those born in 1922 and 1923, became a no-man's land bounded by barbed wire barriers and rows of trenches. That line determined who was to die for Stalin, and who for Greater Germany.

We spent the night in a barn, and woke to cannon fire. By morning the front had passed over us. We rode back along a dusty main road full of German military detachments. In 1942, I enrolled in Tallinn Technical University. All along the plan had been for me to follow in my father's footsteps in the field of Law, but the first Soviet occupation inclined me to reject that idea. As subsequent events showed, this was the right choice. The dark side of the Nazi regime revealed itself to me unexpectedly in the school auditorium. At that moment there was no lecture in session, and isolated students were poring over their study materials. On a side table, attached to a small wire, was a yellow hexagon with the word *Jude*. I thought this was a tasteless joke. But the friend I was with explained the obligatory nature of this symbol.

My appearance in the theatre of war began soon after that. In July 1944 the Narva front crumbled, and the Russians stormed the Blue Hills, the key gateway to Estonia.⁵ We were stationed a few kilometers from the hills, and got orders to attack very late. We had no idea that a part of the battlefield was in plain view of the enemy from the Auvere side. There our company was hit by a volley of fire, mowing many of us down. I flew forward, landing on my chest. When I came to, the first priority was to try to move my toes: they were movable. I pulled off my

⁴ Young Eagles (*Noorkotkad*), youth organization similar to scouts, era of the Estonian republic.

⁵ Blue Hills (*Sinimäed*) and battles on Narva front, July–August 1944, see Glossary.

battle gear and gas mask, and crawled to the graveyard twenty meters or so away. It was hard to tell whether it was a half-dug rectangular grave or a Russian trench, but I rolled myself into it in a hurry. I was lying on my back, and over the edge of the pit I could make out the cross on the neighboring grave. Most of the shells were exploding in the bluish branches of old trees, showering the ground with metal. The noise was hellish. The Russians were very reluctant to give the hills back. I had no clear idea where I was wounded, and felt no real pain. Then came the moment when countless heavy weapons were being loaded at once, and silence fell in the hills. That moment must have lasted ten to fifteen seconds. The deathly silence was suddenly broken by a desperate cry “Mo-ther!!” I firmly believe that everyone who was attacking the middle hill on 28 July at 15:00, remembers that scream to this very day. From then on everything was simple: I could not rise to my feet, a less seriously wounded comrade helped me hobble to the first aid station, which was located on our side of the hill. By the evening I was on a stretcher in the Vaivara village hall; alongside a few hundred or so other stretchers. In a side room were six tables where they were cutting and patching everyone as best they could. Starting at midnight my right hand started hurting a lot. In our row, on the left next to the wall lay a Russian tank operator. His face was burned black, with pink cracks showing through. He kept demanding water in Russian. Toward morning they carried me to the table. Everything went very quickly. There were lots of wounds, and I was told all the edges had to be cut straight. Later I counted 44 wounds. Except for three, all the other shell fragments had caused only minor injuries.

In the middle of September we were taken from the Open-Air School at Kose, near Tallinn to Haapsalu. I felt pretty well already, and could hobble along, but my right hand had stiffened, since a major nerve in my shoulder had gotten bruised. Rumors spread that the hospital was to be evacuated to Saaremaa. In university I had become acquainted with a little lady, and our friendship had grown into a clear intention to marry. I organized things so that I could go to Tallinn to pick up my intended. Completely by chance, when crossing the Viru Square, I ran into a war buddy. He told me what had happened in the Blue Hills after I was wounded. Then something happened that I did not understand at the time. Two jeeps, one bearing a large Estonian flag, drove rapidly along the Narva Road and turned into the street behind the old fire station. A little while later six or seven German

soldiers appeared, chasing them from the Narva Road. They were stopped by gunfire from the garden next to the fire station, and halted in front of the facade of what was later to be the Vocational School. Some time later the gunfire died down, and the Germans kept running. Later I realized that this might have been action in defense of the O. Tief government.⁶

At Edda's place everything happened quickly. Her parents even had time to make her a cloth belt that they stuffed full of some Czarist-era gold rubles. They also gave her a handful of silver cutlery. After tearful farewells we made it to the Haapsalu evening train, which was crammed full of people who wanted to leave. We only arrived in Haapsalu at noon the next day, and it was clear that this had been the last train from Tallinn. Our field hospital had been evacuated. We were hopelessly late. Soon it became evident that there was a small ship in the harbor that was evacuating Swedish Estonians to their homeland. We decided Edda would try to get on that boat. We thought it best to wait until dusk. The attempt to get onto the pier fell through completely. The young lady was sent back politely, but with a stern warning. Allusions to her Swedish background did not help in the least, though from her name one might surmise them. When leaving the harbor we noticed a rowboat pulled onto the shore. It was a nice rental boat, in good working order, and the lovely, calm, warm autumn night tempted us with the idea of rowing to the Noarootsi peninsula or the island of Vormsi. The distances seemed negligible—ten or even five kilometers. Often enough there had been trips up and down Viljandi Lake, which was five kilometers long. It did not take long to decide: "with the girl in the boat, the trip began."⁷ But then there was total shock: no matter how hard I tried, I could not make a single move with my right hand to move us forward. We rearranged: I took the left oar, Edda the right one. But come what may, Edda could not manage her oar. So our boat ride ended at the little peninsula opposite the beach house. The next day Russian tanks pulled into town. We left our hiding place and returned to the Tallinn train. For identity papers I had a ration card issued after the March bombings, wisely provided by my father.

⁶ O. Tief government, abortive attempt to declare Estonian independence in September 1944, in the brief interval of the German retreat and the second Soviet occupation; see Glossary.

⁷ A line from the popular song *The Viljandi Boatman*.

Our home on the corner of Harju and Vana-Posti street had been completely destroyed. Unexpectedly I met one of my war buddies in the train. He pulled out a few German identity papers. I drew the one with the name Ott Laanes. While retreating, they had written out a pile of documents for themselves at the Taebala Town Hall, complete with official seals.

I was relieved—random passport checkers would be completely satisfied. But the more serious problem was: what next? Should I continue my existence as Ott Laanes or myself? Soon it was clear that there was no alternative but to continue as before, under my own name. I would not have been able to do physical work, nor to work in an office, because it was impossible to write with my right hand. My only chance was to go back to university, now called Tallinn Polytechnic Institute. I wrote my practical reports with difficulty using my left hand. Somewhere I had heard that the head physician in the Tallinn maternity hospital was a man named Dr Bernakoff, who was also ostensibly my godfather. I thought I might turn to him about my hand. It had gotten so bad that I no longer had any feeling in my fingers. The doctor gave me a warm welcome, and wrote me a referral letter to a surgeon friend at the Central Hospital. I found myself in a private room, and the next day it was onto the operating table with me, with anesthesia this time around. The next day before I left the hospital, Dr. Järvekülg explained the outcome of the operation—the nerve would recover, but only gradually. Electric-shock therapy followed for half a year, and miraculously the next summer I could already write with my right hand. During the summer holidays I went to work as a technician in the Oil Shale and Chemical Industry Research and Planning Institute. The work there interested me so much that only low test scores forced me to return to lectures at TPI late that fall. It was autumn of 1945. Once or twice a week I visited my fiancée's parents, who lived on Gonsiori Street in the so-called Generals' House. In those days a close watch was kept on that building, in order to catch former residents who had not yet been apprehended in 1940, and who had missed their chance to flee to the West. The garages behind the left front window had been requisitioned by the "authorities," the window had been boarded, and a shelf put up behind it for the guard to lie on. There was a seemingly fortuitous branch hole in the right place. The residents soon noticed, however, that there was often a blinking eye behind the twig-hole. Rumors about the guard post spread rapidly, and when necessary, people

took a roundabout route to avoid it. It was here that I met up with my mother, who I thought had headed via Pärnu to Saaremaa, along with the Women's Defense League people of the Sakala branch. She had sent her luggage on ahead. It was a big surprise when Edda's parents arranged our reunion at their place. Mother had changed her mind at the last minute and had not left Estonia, but this meant that she had to hide her identity with false papers. Father had left in August 1944 on a ship to Germany, and there had been no news about him since.

One day in January 1946 a young lady who worked in the TPI Secretariat sought me out. She reported that the KGB authorities had removed my student identity card from the office. Once again it was time to decide what to do, to surrender, wait, or do something else. I saw an advertisement in the newspaper and enrolled in an accounting course organized by the Union of Dairy Cooperatives. At the end of the two-week course, many of the secrets of bookkeeping were clear to me. Quite clear, in fact, and the reward was a choice between two large dairies to work in. I chose the Kiiu Dairy. Edda and I were to go to Kiiu together. I appeared before my future father-in-law with the formal request for his daughter's hand, but it was clear that my proposal did not make him particularly happy. After pondering a bit, he asked "What are you planning to live on?" I explained that I had some prospects as a bookkeeper. The conversation changed topic, and my proposal was left hanging. That refusal saved Edda and her son Jüri, born a little while later, from a sure trip to Siberia, but it also cut off all ties between us for a decade, and separated our paths in life.

And so the new bookkeeper arrived at the Kiiu dairy as a bachelor. In late summer 1946, my new life, which had begun so auspiciously, ended abruptly. An unstamped letter arrived ordering me to appear in Tallinn at the KGB headquarters on Nunne Street. The stamp on the envelope read, "Free ride on all railways in the republic" I relayed my concerns to the head of the dairy, as well as to the chairman of the Dairy Union. They recommended that I quickly change my place of residence. It was a time when the majority of our people hoped the occupation would come to an end soon. The USA had a monopoly on atomic weapons, and they could have demanded the restoration of democracy in Eastern Europe. What mattered most was to hang on. The newspapers were full of job advertisements. A week later I had been hired as a driver for a reed insulation plate factory being set up in Li-hula. I had to pick out my own lorry from the "trophy vehicles" hauled

together in Nõmme. I was fortunate enough to land a Ford V-8 in fine working order. I soon had to abandon that job, since a professional driver was found, a Russian, who was definitely more suitable. I was assigned to the job of technician, where my main responsibility was to make sure office affairs were in order.

Perhaps one of my most significant decisions falls into this period of my life. We had come to Lihula with the director of the factory's production department. We trusted each other absolutely. Twice I noticed that he handed over petroleum to an unidentified young man, but to my surprise, the third time, he introduced him to me. It was in the fall of 1946 that Manivalde and I first met. He familiarized me with the activities of the RVL⁸ (Armed Resistance League), and at our next meeting a few weeks later I was issued a membership card. The RVL was active at a time when opposition to the occupation was still considered normal among the people. Decades later the occupation became "normal life," and collaboration the condition for progress. The constitution of the RVL stated as its goal to prevent the recurrence of the 1941 scenario, that is, to prevent the deportations, murders, destruction and looting of material and artistic goods, all of which had accompanied the previous collapse of the occupation regime, as well as to hinder any efforts to build up the structures of the new regime. RVL activities brought me into contact with the organization headquarters and leaders at a time of rapid expansion of the organization. At their suggestion I began living and working in Pärnu. My workplace was the Inventory Bureau. The workload was heavy, and thus most of the workers, myself included, did not have room in the office and had to work at home. This gave me complete free rein with regard to how I used my time. My passport was stamped, "Pärnu City Executive Committee," since we were under their jurisdiction. Apparently, the previous winter there had been a background check on me, and to my surprise at the beginning of the summer there was a summons to headquarters. Manivalde and I drove to Konovere. The first visit to headquarters left a deep impression. Konovere is a little branch station, where everyone who boards or leaves a train is in plain view. We walked along the riverbank

⁸ RVL (*Relvastatud Võitluse Liit*) translated as Union for Armed Struggle, is an organization that was part of the more amorphous movement of partisans referred to as the "Forest Brothers." See Glossary. See also Valdur Raudvassar's life story for another account of participation in the Forest Brothers.

on a forest path until we reached a very old farm hut.⁹ There, where everything was saturated with the bittersweet smell of smoke, we were offered lodgings for the night. In the morning, we moved on a little way along the same path, directly into the woods, with Manivalde in front, and me at his heels. Among the bushes there was a tent, difficult to tell apart from the surroundings. One of the men was asleep, the other introduced himself as “Jaan.” Ahead of us the woods got thicker and the ground was wetter. The bunker was located on the other side of a clearing. This was called “Põrgupõhja” (The Bottom of Hell), one of the footholds of the RVL headquarters. The other manned bunker was about fifteen kilometers to the north, and bore the name “Taevaskoja” (Heaven’s Hall). Next to the latter was “Päevakodu” (Days Home), always unmanned, and used by the organization’s leader Olev for meetings with people from outside. We shook hands with six men and one woman: Olev, Rumm, Vanaisa, Kolja, Jüri, Annus and Asta. The conversation took place among Olev, Rumm, Manivalde and myself. I had become thoroughly acquainted with two of them. Rumm had spent the night at my place several times. Olev always showed an interest in me and my parents, and always left a pleasant impression. The motivation for expanding the organization was the promise of aid from the USA. It was imperative to show the world our desire to be a free people once again. My assignment was to find a way to send a representative of the organization to the West, participation in the work of the State Police Court, and if necessary, communication with headquarters. Due to strict conspiratorial rules, I was not given exhaustive information about the extent of the organization. It was generally known that the RVL had representation in Tallinn, Haapsalu, and in the counties of Läänemaa, Pärnumaa, Järvamaa, Viljandimaa, Harjumaa, Tartumaa, and Virumaa.

For lunch we ate roast goat. When we left, Olev asked me to register a motorcycle that Manivalde was to buy in my own name. Olev was waiting in Konovere: a band of men unknown to us had robbed food provisions from a nearby farm. If the farm owner had reported the matter to the authorities, all of the headquarters’ positions would have been put in danger. Olev demanded the decision of the security commission. The three of us, Rumm, Manivalde, and I discussed the

⁹ The name for this type of old farm dwelling is *suitsutare*, a chimneyless hut with a vent in the roof to let out the smoke.

matter. It was not possible to make a legal report. There were no witnesses. The constitution indicated legal responsibility in the courts of a restored Estonian Republic, which we hoped would happen that same year or the next. Thus it was imperative to justify the decision appropriately. Olev was a bit disappointed when we asked him to get a deposition from the victim, but he promised to obtain it.

In the summer I drove around in Läänemaa, Harju, and elsewhere. In Pärnu we made contact with a former bootlegger to find a way to cross the sea. The results were slow to appear. With Olev and the others, we met at “Päevakodu” with a man who claimed to be the radio operator for Admiral Pitka’s group,¹⁰ he wanted to join with us. Along with the supervisor of Paeküla train station we considered the possibility of establishing a secret observation station at the crossroads of the Tallinn–Pärnu road and the Tallinn–Virtsu railroad.

I had spent all of my time of late on RVL business, so when I got to Pärnu, it turned out that I had been fired from the Inventory Bureau. With certain difficulties, I was able to get myself hired again. I worked up to speed for a few weeks, in order to get listed on the wage sheet. One day a stranger stopped me on the street, who turned out to be the dispatcher at the Pärnu railway station. The story was straightforward: members of the blue-black- and white organization would be transported in the next few days by train from Tallinn to Leningrad. He asked me to inform headquarters and to do something. Again, I went to Konovere and gave a report. Olev hesitated; it was a high risk operation, and there was practically no time for preparation.

The occupation authorities were making thorough efforts to put an end to any kind of active resistance. Many townships had been supplied with Interior Ministry units. They were supported by the “people’s defense” recruited by the authorities. A ten-man unit of Interior Ministry forces had been housed in Lieutenant Härm’s farm twelve kilometers from “Taevaskoja.” In the bunker at “Põrgupõhja” several military trenchcoats with Interior Ministry officers’ insignia hung on

¹⁰ Admiral Johan Pitka, (1872–1944), Military commander during Estonian War of Independence. During the Estonian Republic he lived for an extended period abroad, he returned to Estonia in spring 1944, he organized a last defense of Tallinn against the Red Army and in support of the attempted government of O. Tief and J. Uluots. See also Glossary, under Johan Pitka and Otto Tief.

pegs. Toward the end of October Olev summoned me to headquarters. The weather was brisk; we were both warmly dressed, and walked back and forth along a path paved with yellow leaves, from the bunker deep into the forest and back again. Pieces of pork had been scattered along the path. The headquarters was preparing to withdraw into isolation, as snow would fall soon. The mood of our last meeting had not been good. Another year had gone by, but the hoped-for solution had not come. RVL had not been built for long-term resistance, which was impossible in conditions of total dictatorship. It did not dawn on me for a moment that on New Year's Eve they would shoot Manivalde, who had just barely awakened and reached for his pistol; that two weeks after that three *chekists* would jump on me in Pärnu station, that Rumm would fall while defending the staff bunker just a little over a year later; that Olev would outlive him only by a few months.

The RVL got a major blow in the last days of 1947. After the currency reform they needed to obtain some new currency. The money-runners were quick to alert the KGB and Interior Ministry forces. On New Year's Eve there was a raid on "Põrgupõhja," and a little later on "Taevaskoja." The alarm system designed to alert the county branches failed. A betrayal in the Tallinn narrow-gauge railway station was fateful, since it tore apart the legal wing of the organization. Over 100 members were arrested.

On 15 January 1948 we arrived in Tallinn. The night before I had been arrested in Pärnu. A black ZIM, the largest passenger car at that time, stood waiting for me in the station. I was pushed down into the middle of the back seat, with two of the accompanying personnel on each side, a third in my lap. The first stop, for almost two weeks, was Nunne Street. That was a very tough time. Then I was taken to the Pagari Street basement, where I stayed for half a year. The cell in the infamous Pagari basement was designed to break the will of its occupant as fast as possible. Moisture condensed on both the inner and outer walls. It took only a month for the silk lining of a winter coat to be green with mould. Seventeen people were crammed into the small room. The cellar operated on the principle of "no free spaces." If someone was removed, a replacement was brought in immediately. On the average a prisoner was detained there for one to two months of interrogation, which were held at night. Brutal guards made sure that no one got any sleep during the day. For a few months my companions in that cell included Harri Haamer, the pastor of the Tartu congregation of

St. Paul.¹¹ He saw to it that on Sundays, “the Lord God lifted his arms over us and gave us his peace.” As a former scoutmaster and learned person, he often succeeded in forcing us to forget the gloomy walls that surrounded us. His religious sermons amounted to a complete confirmation course, and therefore he promised that for those of us who had not yet been confirmed, he would issue the corresponding certificate at the earliest possible opportunity. My closest neighbor in Cell 13 was Colonel Saar, former head of the Harju Unit of the Defense League. He was also connected with the RVL, and the interrogators tried to accuse him of preparations to blow up the Russian memorial on Tõnismäe.

In midsummer 1948, I was ordered out to the yard of the Pagari “fortress” and shoved into the little closet of a “Black Crow.”¹² I was moved to Patarei prison. On the way the escort opened the door for a moment, and through the barred back window of the car a lovely view emerged: sunlight and greenery! The difference between Patarei and Pagari prisons was like day and night. In Patarei, an old naval fortress, the cell was a room with a vaulted ceiling in an old naval with a window opening right onto the sea.¹³ In stormy weather the wind blew spray into the window. Already the next day I was unable to breathe or speak normally. A half a year in a damp cellar had made for a bad case of bronchitis, as soon as one breathed fresher air. All of the people connected with our case, that is the hundred or so of us with ties to RVL, had been rounded up in Patarei. All of them were people who had lived and worked legally. There were few true Forest Brothers, for it was much more difficult and dangerous to capture them. The death penalty had been changed in the Soviet Union in 1947, so the heaviest penalties for the likes of us were twenty-five plus five years. I also had to sign my name to such a decision, which was made by the prosecution, though there was no trial of any kind. I was sentenced as a representative of the RVL center.

I was kept in Patarei through the summer of 1949. It might be thought that they needed me in order to identify members of the center’s staff whom they were still trying to nab. Freedom has always exacted a heavy price. Within a short time Olev—Endel Redlich,

¹¹ Also mentioned in the life story of Asta Luksepp.

¹² Stolypin prison van.

¹³ The Patarei prison, see Glossary.

Rumm—Viktor Rumjantsev, and Manivalde—Helmut Valdma, had succeeded in creating a resistance organization consisting of 500–1000 people. On New Year's Eve 1947 the *Chekists* raided the staff bunker at "Põrgupõhja." The staff broke through the circle, but lost two people. The next fall the staff's new location was raided. It was not until February of 1949 that they were able to crush the center totally. That final battle is commemorated today by a marker near Pärnu-Jaagupi. Viktor Rumjantsev fell in that battle; Endel Redlich, the organization's leader, fell in an exchange of fire in midsummer 1949. Not knowing all of this, I was relieved when my journey to Russia began in July 1949. First Lasnamäe, then Leningrad, and on to Vologda, the routing prison notorious since the Tsarist days, located in an imposing medieval fortress. Judging from the position of the sun, it was likely that we were moving northeast. We reached the Urals—from the little window under the ceiling one could see relatively low snow-covered mountains. On the third day we already noticed snow on the hillsides on the north side of the railway. This confirmed our hunch that we were on our way to Vorkuta. As we were driven in to the first holding pen, everyone was called out by name, and had to answer several questions, including one about occupation. Since I had a few courses of engineer's training under my belt, I called out in my broken Russian something like "construction engineer." The first days in Camp No. 6 were devoted to safety instruction. The newcomers were divided between the "above ground" and "underground" ones. If one had health problems, he landed in the above ground category, which was most desirable. The strong, healthy ones were in demand down below. I was assigned to the ventilation department, work that was considered a little better than a lava miner. In the cafeteria four of us sat together at table—a Latvian office worker, two Germans—a sculptor and a dentist, and one Estonian "construction engineer." We all suffered from chronic sleep deprivation, since most of the time left over from work was taken up by the trek to the mines and back. The distance was barely a kilometer, but instead of ten minutes it took hours. First the thousand-headed human dragon had to be counted over by the prison guards. Calculations were made on little pieces of board. Then "Forward march!" and stop again. Then they had to conduct a head count. God willing, the figures would add up. The convoy quickly recited our "rights": *Step to the left, step to the right—we fire without warning.* And then quickly-quickly into the mine. Laggards were encouraged by means of dogs. Upon our entry into the

mine territory the guard there had to count us over yet again, and it was the same story on the way back. Not all of the brigades finished their work at the same time. When they had quickly changed into cleaner and warmer clothing they still resembled painted ghosts with pitch black eyeholes. Special officials, also prisoners, quickly formed a column and the mine guards count them over. It was very cold, 30 degrees below, and every meter of distance is counted as two more degrees of cold. The figures often did not match. Again and again they failed to add up to the number that arrived in the morning. The whole facility had to be searched again. Finally when they located the man who fell asleep the mob works him over immediately: that is one thing both guard and prisoner agree on.

Below ground in the mines it was very hard at first. The first job was loading the cars in a passageway on an incline, then pulling the cars up into the horizontal passage. Once while returning from work in the middle of winter I felt a sudden attack of the shivers coming on. I went to the infirmary, where the average of two thermometers indicated 40.2 C. The accompanying guard had to attest to my arrival at the hospital barracks. The orderly was responsible for removing the last speck of coal dust from my addled body. This was done in the vestibule of the barracks, where the temperature was a few degrees above zero. I stood in a steel bathtub, scrubbing myself in front, the orderly from behind. The cold shivers sharpen one's pain threshold. By morning the fever had broken, leaving only a heavy lethargy. A few days later the doctor did a thorough examination and confirmed the diagnosis: dystrophy.¹⁴ They have a much better word for it in Russian, *dahadjaga*, which in Estonian means someone "who is starting to get somewhere."

In addition to my hospital rations I was now prescribed a "second breakfast," composed of a piece of white bread and a glass of bitter tea. About three weeks later I was back with my comrades. In the summer they formed a branch of the construction office in the town. For this they rounded up all kinds of prisoner-specialists from several places. As it can be seen, my "construction engineer" ruse worked. Our supervisor was an energetic Jew named Rahmel. He made it clear to the camp commanders that for planning and projection work he needed well rested men. And wonder of wonders! Six beds fit into our little

¹⁴ This diagnosis acknowledges, though indirectly, that the real cause of the illness was severe malnutrition and overwork.

room. Time was running out for Stalin's regime. At night they started to lock the barracks, head counts were carried out daily. The food quality worsened. The well-meaning Rahmel convinced the mine bosses to transfer small amounts of funds into our accounts. This allowed us to get additional food products on the basis of a list.

We hoped that Stalin's death would bring immediate relief. But very little changed. When the commission got to the camp to look through all the files and interview all the prisoners one by one, many of the sentences were reduced from twenty-five years to ten and prisoners were soon released. My sentence was reduced to fifteen years. One day I was given permission to go to work in town. I had to be back at 10 PM. Time went on and eventually I was given permission to live in town as well. I got a little room in an old camp barracks, and worked as senior construction engineer. Outwardly there was little difference between my way of life and that of free men, that is former prisoners or "resettled" people. The maximum privilege accorded during Khrushchev's "thaw" was a ten day vacation at home for those who wished it. I, too, took advantage of this, and one summer day in 1956 got to Moscow by train, arriving a few days later in Tartu. Of course my mother was overjoyed. When I got back to the polar zone, a decree came from the Party committee to summarily fire men such as myself. Fortunately the major construction department of the plant already knew me well, and I was redirected to my previous mine. There I began working as an overseer, later as assistant director for the construction department. We were building several different things at once: a sector of Finnish houses¹⁵ in town, three story brick buildings, a house of culture, a new administrative building for the mine, and a giant ventilation plant. There was a great shortage of machinery, which was supposed to be compensated by a very large number of workers.

I was called on the carpet due to another overseer's manipulations with prisoners' quotas, according to which one could reduce one's term by a few months. For a long time nothing was said about the sanctions that were threatened for attempted aid to prisoner's illegal liberation. I hoped they would leave things be, but a few days before my release date I was told that due to "absence of restraint I would be deprived

¹⁵ Finnish houses, prefabricated houses that were easily assembled and that came into use after World War II.

of one month's worth of work." Of course this punishment was but a trifle, and I was happy it ended that well.

The actual moment of my release in the fall of 1958 almost did not even register in my memory. Except perhaps the fact that my cardboard slab "identity card" was replaced by a passport. Upon receipt of this I had to sign a prohibition to reside in Moscow, Odessa, and several other Russian cities, as well as the Baltic states. For the time being I decided to stay in Vorkuta. The plant was offering me the position of supervisor of the construction department in the mine construction bureau. A new mine and a residential area were being built even farther to the north, near Halmer-Ju. I accepted the offer. Before starting work I decided to visit the Tallinn Polytechnic Institute and get myself a certificate for the examinations I had passed. Everything went smoothly in Tallinn, and equipped with my official TPI letter I made my way back to Moscow, where I met with an official of the USSR Ministry of Higher Education. In the Moscow hostel I learned the meaning of the seemingly innocent comment in my passport, "passport regime." It turned out that the holder of such a passport could not stay in Moscow nor in many of the "closed cities" of the Soviet Union.

Soon I received a letter in Vorkuta. The ministry considered it necessary to accept me into the Union-Wide Distance Learning Polytechnic Institute, in view of my previous record of examinations at TPI. I weighed the situation carefully: whatever it took, I had to get back home. The surroundings I had succeeded in getting used to over long years were left behind: the polar night with its minus 30–40 degree frosts; the fog, filled with the sour smell of perpetually burning waste products; tundra as far as eye could see, flat as a board; and in the summer months clothed with lovely pastel colors. Along with this, of course, the midnight sun in summer and the Northern Lights in winter. Farewell, Vorkuta, farewell forever.

I returned home to Tartu with a certain feeling of apprehension. I was only registered to live in Mother's little room on Vaba Street, and that was temporarily, in 1958. I never forgot for a moment that I was officially forbidden to settle in Estonia. I thought I could find a satisfactory solution by finding a job in Petseri,¹⁶ but there was no job there that matched my qualifications. Somehow I found out that a supervisor was needed at the Teedla *sovhoz* near Elva. I took my employment

¹⁶ Petseri is the southeastern corner of Estonia, on the Russian border

record and went there. At Teedla we had a chance to put up several major buildings, and then I happened to run across my former coworker, Peeter Varep in Tartu. Having heard of my rocky career, he offered me work at the “Estonian Construction Project.” I went to Tallinn and applied to the militia headquarters, which as fate would have it was located in the same building on Nunne Street where my road of sufferings began. There I put my passport on the table and asked whether I could live in Tallinn with such a document. The generous response was “Of course, since last December Tallinn is an open city.” It was March 1961.

In the summer of 1961 I married Eha, whom I had gotten to know in my Teedla period. My correspondence courses were going well—the examinations in specialized subjects did not require much preparation. There were difficulties with business trips to Moscow, where I had to travel often, especially after 1964. Of course I could not answer that they should refrain from sending me off on business, since I was not allowed to stay in Moscow. My former buddies from the Vorkuta construction office were helpful in this regard. The model master there, Ivan Darkov, my so-called “academic father,” made it possible for me to stay in Moscow while defending my diploma thesis. Three households shared a communal apartment. In the mornings we all washed in the kitchen at the cast iron sink. At night a folding cot was brought into the room for me, half of which had to fit under the table. Thus I graduated from university in Moscow as a kind of illegal university student. Written on my diploma was: “Enrolled in 1942, graduated in 1962.” Soon after concluding my studies I was promoted to the head construction specialist of the institute.

It is said that those people are fortunate whose work duties and hobbies coincide. So it was for me—going to work early in the morning was never repulsive. Without a doubt those twenty years in the position of head construction specialist were the happiest period in my life. The people around me saw life much the way I did. Our mutual understanding was impressive. My marriage was harmonious as well: Eha and I were a good match. In this life story there are just a few lines devoted to those twenty years, for who would be interested in the happiness of a stranger...

The year 1968 arrived. My passport was now ten years old and due for renewal. Getting a new passport proved not to be so easy. It was still unclear whether the new passport had to be inscribed with the

same discriminating comment that had oppressed me in the old one. This dead end situation lasted for quite awhile, until finally they wrote in the restriction again. This meant I would be listed as repressed for another eight years, until 1976, when the new passport with the red covers would no longer be a direct reflection of one's "biography." In the fall of 1990, the Estonian SSR Procurate seemed to be in a hurry to rehabilitate me. Attitudes started to change quickly, and it was no longer permissible to admit the fact that the accuser and the judge were one and the same: I had been found guilty according to the decision of the procurate.

In 1992 Eha and I moved to Tartu. The circle of life was complete. There I was, back in good old Tartu, where this story got started.



Leida Madison

BORN 1925

History has scattered the Estonian people all over the world, like dandelion seed that the wind has carried long distances. Wherever they have landed, they have put down strong roots. This shows how hard-working the Estonian people are.

My ancestors, pure-blooded Estonians for many generations back, originated in the township of Kuusalu in northern Estonia, but in 1884 they found them-

selves a new place to grow roots, in Abkhazia, on the shores of the Black Sea.¹

In those days, the land was covered by virgin forest—oak, chestnut, beech, and *sinari* trees,² and there was not a living soul except for wild animals. It was into this kind of forest, where one could always hear the howling of wolves and jackals, the roaring of bears, and the grunting of wild boar, that the Estonians settled, my grandparents among them. This is where they founded the lovely Salme village. It was rough starting out, since they had to work very hard to find themselves shelter and livelihood in the woods. But before long the forest drew back and villages sprang up. Most of the houses had two to four rooms, and were built of oak logs, plastered inside and out, then white-washed. The Estonian houses were lovely, a pleasant sight to all those who passed by.

Soon abundant grain fields were growing, and wonderful grape and black plum orchards. The soil in Abkhazia is rich in clay, but very fertile. Fruit orchards were the main source of income. The most

¹ Russian Estonians, see Glossary.

² Sinari trees: a local term for a type of plane tree.

common grains were corn and wheat. New crops were also tried out for variety. In the 1930s there was cotton. As children we had to clean it of seeds with a tiny handheld machine; after that we helped card it, and Mother spun cotton yarn from it with her spinning wheel. Then another new plant appeared: the geranium, a fragrant bushy plant about 40–50 cm high with pink and red blossoms. The state imposed a quota on the farmers as to how much they had to grow of it. When it was ripe we turned it over to the state, and they paid the farmers good money for it. The plants were sent to a perfume factory.

We also raised silkworms for awhile. At first, when we knew very little about silkworms, we signed for ten grams of silk-moth eggs from the state. Such a huge number of five to six centimeter long worms came out of these tiny eggs that they drove the whole family out of the house, which consisted of two rooms and a kitchen. We had to sleep in Father's large, new haybarn. It was a good thing it was summer and the weather was warm. The next year we were wiser, and only signed for five grams of eggs. We fed the silkworms mulberry leaves. Getting the mulberry branches was children's work. It was interesting to observe the life cycle and activities of the silkworms. We especially liked to watch how they would weave beautiful white, yellow, and pink cocoons around themselves after they were fully fed—these were the silkworm cases, from which silk thread was made in the factories.

Both of my parents were born in Salme village: my father, Aleksander Kivi, in 1893, and my mother, Amalie Kivi (born Tiismus), in 1894. I saw the light of day on 19 September 1925 in Salme village near the banks of the Psou river, which to this day is the border between Abkhazia and Russia. From early childhood, when I rode our white horse Noksi to the river to let him drink, wash and swim, I loved that fast-flowing mountain stream, and my sisters, brother, and I would go swimming there constantly. The house where I was born was located at the end of Salme village on the side of Neebu Mountain. The new settlers gave the mountain the name Neebu, from the Russian *Nebo*, meaning sky. This mountain with seven peaks connected the villages of Salme and Sulev.

I had three sisters and one brother. My sister Lilli was born in 1919, my brother Lembit in 1921, my sister Helmi in 1924, and my sister Salme in 1935. Today there are only three of us still alive, only the sisters: Helmi still lives in Abkhazia in Salme village in very difficult circumstances; Salme and I live in Pärnu.

We had a very strict upbringing. We were forbidden to lift a finger to touch anyone else's property. When guests came to visit my parents, the children had to leave the room. From early childhood we participated in all the work. I did not like herding cows at all; we had two or three of them. While herding, Helmi and I played with dolls we had made for ourselves, making cornsilk braids for their hair, and while we were doing this the cows would often wander off and Mother would punish us. I remember how one Sunday we harvested potatoes all day long with my parents. As we were getting home, it was already twilight. Mother asked three of us children—my brother, my older sister, and myself, to gather grass for the rabbits. Since it was autumn, and there was not any hay to be had, my brother, who was the oldest, suggested that we go to the neighbor's hayfield and gather what was left of the clover. We were out for a long time, and Mother came looking for us. When she saw us coming with the clover from the neighbor's side, she got angry and talked to Father. We were very afraid of him, and all three of us crept under the beds to hide. Father took good-sized switches, and pulled us out from under the bed one by one. He beat the switches to shreds on my brother and older sister, but since I was the youngest I was not punished as severely.

The social life of Salme village was very lively. There was a drama circle, a mixed choir and a women's choir, and their performances included solos and poetry recitations. The outdoor parties at the May holidays were always enjoyable. A nice spot would be found on a hillside where the village people would gather. Blankets would be spread on the grass in the shade of trees, and food and drink spread out. There was singing and dancing to the music of a brass band. Children would be taken along, and we had a great deal of fun. In 1948 the Salme village choir took part in the Tallinn song festival.³ The choir has visited Tallinn at other times, too.

The "political re-education" of the settlers was unsuccessful, even though different kinds of political discussion circles were formed according to the Russian model. The main reason re-education failed was the repressions of 1937–38.⁴ In the years 1940–1950 Caucasians were resettled in Estonian villages, and this caused an economic decline.

³ Song festival, see Glossary.

⁴ Stalin's purges, the personal and local impact of which the author describes at greater length a few paragraphs later.

World War II left its mark on everything. The poorer families did not even have a radio. Because we did not have much money, we did not subscribe to newspapers, and so some of the Estonians were living cut off from the rest of the world, living inside a sack, as it were. As for myself, I had no interest whatsoever in politics in my youth, and, to be honest, have none now, either. When I finished the seven grade school at Salme, my stint as a Young Pioneer was over, and after all I had lived through I had not the slightest intention of joining the Komsomol.⁵ Not even after the war, when I worked for three years as a teacher in the Salme school.

During the early years, when Salme village had just been founded, and a two-room schoolhouse was built, the local parish clerk-schoolmasters⁶ would hold church services there once or twice a month. The village did not have a church of its own. Going to church was not really in fashion, and with the years it disappeared completely, since the Soviet regime did not look favorably on it. Children were christened in homes. I had two godmothers, Anetta Kevvai and Amalie Vatmann, and one godfather, Johannes Krönstrem. Before we were of school age, we went to summer kindergarten in the schoolhouse. Since I already knew how to read, I started school early, at the age of six, tagging along with my sister Helmi, a year and a half older than me, who was entering the first grade. I was not to be left behind! My first teacher was my aunt, my father's sister Ella Jänes, who was real "salt of the earth." Her lessons were interesting, and she also organized delightful excursions. She even took us to the airfield at Adler, where we, little country children, saw an airplane for the first time in our lives, and were given a chance to fly over the town. This was an unforgettable experience. Ella Jänes also directed the grownups' choir. Every summer she was given a free vacation in a resort or sanatorium by the state educational administration, as well as plenty of awards, including the Order of Lenin.

⁵ Komsomol, Communist Youth organization. Membership was nominally "voluntary," though recruitment varied in its intensity. Often membership in the Komsomol was a determining factor in gaining admission to university (see also Linda Põldes' story and Glossary).

⁶ Sexton-schoolmasters (*Kõster-koolmeister*)—non-ordained men (usually Estonians) who assisted the pastor of the local parish, and performed a variety of services, including teaching elementary school.

The Komsomol and the Young Pioneers⁷ were established in Abkhazia in 1925, but in the beginning the movement did not catch on. The teachers were unprepared for this kind of work. I remember a popular children's song from 1932: "Little child do not go there, to be a cursed pioneer, Better go to church, and send your prayers to heaven, then your whole life long, you will not fear a thing." A few years passed until the pioneer organizations took hold in the village schools. Then we were taught a different song: "We don't believe the nonsense of the priests, and we don't go to church to plead, holy days are rubbish to us, the working people's feast is May."

The tunes of both of these songs have stuck in my memory. The children were confused: whom were they supposed to believe? School won out, in my case probably also because my teacher was a member of my family. I remember a total of about 30 songs that we were taught in childhood. I have taught them to my pupils in Pärnu, and have performed them on two occasions on the Estonian Television show "Grandmother's Songchest."

My mother was religious, and taught her children the Lord's Prayer and songs at home. One of these was the Lutheran carol "Good tidings from on high I bring." Mother did not give us permission to join the Young Pioneers. But since the majority of our schoolmates were already members, our teacher, Aunt Ella Jänes bought us neckerchiefs, and so we became Pioneers. There was no ceremony and no vow. There was not even a senior Pioneer leader at the school, and the teachers shared that role. If we should happen to break into the song "We don't believe the nonsense of the priests" at home, there would be big trouble with my mother.

Our teacher in the upper grades was Hans Jänes (aunt Ella's husband). I played mandolin and guitar in the school orchestra. We had two violins at home, which were played by my father. Sometimes, very seldom, when Father was in a good mood, we organized evening string concerts at home, which Mother very much enjoyed.

I had a good childhood, until Stalin's regime showed its horrible face and our lovely birthplace became a place of heartache. This was in the years 1937–38. Our father was a poor farmer. We had only six hectares of land. Father and Mother had planted a large apple orchard, two orchards of French plum trees, and there were many

⁷ Communist youth organization for elementary school students.

mandarin orange and hazelnut bushes. When collective farms began to be organized at the beginning of the 1930s, Father did not join the *kolkhoz*, with the justification that he had a large family, and would not be able to feed us. And so, as an opponent of *kolkhozes*, our father was one of the first ones who faced the road to Siberia. In 1937–38 mass deportations and repressions of Estonians began all over Russia. Among those arrested were two fine teachers from our school, Hans Jänes, and Erkmann.⁸

At that time I was still too small to understand the full extent of what was happening. I cannot write or talk about those times calmly and without tears. Some 22 years later we received a letter from the Supreme Court of Abkhazia informing us that our father had been totally rehabilitated, since there was no proof of guilt. But Father himself never returned.

In the early years of her marriage, Mother had suffered from meningitis, which had left its mark on her health. She also suffered from heart trouble, and because of this she had a medical certificate exempting her from all mental and physical labor. When Father was arrested, the family soon found itself in a difficult situation, since it had lost its only breadwinner. We four children were still in school, and our youngest sister was only two and a half years old.

Mother still had her wedding gift from her parents—two five-ruble gold coins. She took them and went to the *upravlenie*⁹ at the *kolkhoz* centre, and asked for a food subsidy in return for the gold coins. Instead of giving aid, the *kolkhoz pravlenie* sent the coins on to the police. Soon they came to search our house, in the middle of the night, of course. I remember that they turned all the bureau drawers and cabinets upside down, looking for more gold. They even dumped out all the matchboxes on the floor, thinking there might be some gold hidden there. But gold was about the only thing they did not find there. And that was how the local Estonians from the *pravlenie* “helped out” an Estonian family with many children that had fallen on dire straits. Some time later they came for Mother and took her away, too. Where

⁸ In Estonia, aggressive collectivization of farms came much later, in the post-war period in the late 1940s, enforced by a large-scale deportation of rural folk in 1949. See life stories of Hans Karro, Linda Põldes, Peep Vunder.

⁹ *Upravlenie* and contracted form *pravlenie*—local administration, in this case the central office of the *kolkhoz* (collective farm)

did they take her? There was no news whatsoever. She just disappeared. Five brothers and sisters were left alone. No one asked how the children were doing, and there was no help nor support from the state at all. In the summers we worked in the *kolkhoz* doing lighter jobs, and in the fall we went to school. We got something to supplement our diets from our garden at home. Soon my older sister Lilli married Alfred Aberut from the village of Sulev. She left home and later they moved to Krasnodar *krai*, to the town of Labinsk, where some Estonians were living. During the tumult of war my sister became seriously ill and died in 1943. Her husband was left alone with their four-year-old son. My sister Helmi and I decided to take the child to live with us, even though our own life was far from easy.

In August 1944, I made the trip to Labinsk, in the land of Kuban to pick up our little nephew. I found the address where my brother-in-law was living, but no one was at home. The neighbors said he had gone out on the steppe with the grain combine. I went looking for him. A wide road wound through the middle of the steppe, with grainfields on both sides. The sun burned down on my head, and the hot wind stirred the large heads of grain. The whole steppe looked like it was rising and falling in waves like the sea. What an impressive sight! I had already been walking along the road for an hour and a half without seeing a single soul, neither human nor animal. Only the birds circled high in the air, singing. I was in the steppe for the first time in my life. For some reason I was struck by the sudden fear of being alone in the middle of such a huge grain field. Besides, the sun was setting. I stopped and looked around, perplexed. Then I noticed a shape approaching me along the road. There was the combine, and to my great joy, my brother-in-law was in the driver's seat. I climbed up beside him on the combine, and we were off to town.

The next day I took little Andel along and the train carried us homeward. The little boy was ill. He was anemic, and there were patches of eczema on his scalp. The older village folk had a name for the condition. We consulted various doctors in Sotši, Gagra, and elsewhere; we were given all sorts of remedies to take externally and internally, but nothing helped. An acquaintance in the village once mentioned an Armenian healer who lived up in the mountains. When my brother-in-law found out about this, he categorically forbade taking his son to the healer, but Helmi and I decided we would go anyway. We had to take the bus 20 kilometers or so up into the mountains, and

then walk another two or three kilometers. The healer examined the child, mumbled something to himself, and then asked him to open his mouth. He cut the roof of the boy's mouth open crosswise with a razor blade. Black blood began oozing out, frightening all of us. The healer reassured us saying that this was all as it should be, that the bad blood needed to come out. Afterwards he told us to rinse the child's mouth with clean spring water, and then let us go. After that treatment the child's health quickly improved.

When the child was ready for school, his father took him back to Labinsk, where he eventually graduated from high school. After that Andel travelled to Estonia to be with me. He enrolled in the Pärnu Maritime Academy, and after graduation, went to sea. Soon he had to quit that job for health reasons, and returned to Labinsk, where he now lives in his father's house. Andel's wife is Estonian, and they have a grown-up son and daughter. Over the course of life's many changes, we have lost touch.

My brother Lembit was drafted into the army on 31 May 1941, on his 20th birthday. The Second World War broke out soon after that. His last letter was dated 1 December 1942 from Velikije Luki, and announced "Tomorrow I go into battle for the first time."¹⁰ After that he was missing in action. And so only three sisters were left in our family.

In 1937 all of the Estonian schools in Russia were shut down, and they rounded up all Estonian language schoolbooks, which had been sent from Estonia and Leningrad. (In those days there was an Estonian-language publishing house and an Estonian teacher training school in Leningrad). After that we had to continue our studies in Russian schools.

At first the Salme village school had two grades, and then it expanded to four, still later to seven grades. I finished five grades in the Estonian school, and the remaining two in the Russian school. This was extraordinarily difficult for Estonian children due to their poor knowledge of the Russian language.

With the village school behind me, I faced a crossroads: what would I do next? Since the first grade, our great role model had been our teacher Ella Jänes, and already then I had thought about becoming a teacher. Aunt Ella was a large woman, and I remember that we

¹⁰ Battle of Velikije Luki, December 1942–January 1943; for a lengthier description, see the life story of Elmar-Raimund Ruben.

little girls all dreamed of being just like our teachers in every way, even in terms of size. But time flew by, and my wishes changed. Since I had a talent for drawing, and my friend Leili Kalmus enrolled in art school in Sukhum, I decided to go there as well. When my grandfather Aleksander Kivi, who was paying for my education, heard about my plan, he said. "What do you mean, art school? Art has never fed anyone! You shall study to be a teacher or a doctor." There was no choice. Since my first wish in childhood had been to become a teacher, I withdrew my papers from the art school and submitted them to the Abkhazian Russian Pedagogical Institute in Sukhum. And that was how I became an elementary school teacher, which I have never regretted. I have always enjoyed working with younger children.

At first it was difficult to cope in the pedagogical school, again, because of my poor knowledge of Russian. I remember how once I wanted to iron a dress, but did not know the Russian words for iron and ironing. I managed to communicate with the other girls by hand gestures. In the dormitory twenty girls shared a large room. The Second World War was on, and our youth was no bed of roses. I had already sewn a dress for myself at the age of 11. Mother just handed me a piece of cotton fabric, and said, "Sew yourself a dress! And make it a good one!" I had to do as she said.

Now, as a student in the pedagogical school, Grandmother would sometimes, not often, give me a piece of cotton cloth for a dress. In our second year of study, my friend Liidia got married. I had just finished making a new cotton dress when she asked me to lend it to her for her wedding day. Of course I gave it to her: all of us were poor. And so after her civil wedding, my friend wore my dress for two weeks straight, and only gave it back after I asked her repeatedly. Once Grandmother bought me a bright orange coat, apparently because it was cheap. I have never been fond of the color orange, and so I decided to dye it brown. The dyeing failed totally, leaving the coat orange with brown patches. In the winter our classrooms were unheated and we were allowed to sit in class with our coats on. Our young teacher Ludmilla A., the wife of the people's commissar of Abkhazia, was well-respected, lovely-looking, and always well dressed. Once she called me up to the blackboard to solve a problem, and seeing my patchy coat asked, in Russian, "Kivi, what happened to your coat?" I could have fallen through the floor with shame.

When we began the third and last year of study, the front had drawn very close to the town of Sotši. The war did not touch us

directly, even though one could hear rumbling and see the glow of fires in the distance. Some bombs exploded at the border of Salme village, near the big bridge over the Psou River, but fortunately the bridge was not destroyed. In 1941 we had felt the effects of the advancing front in Abkhazia.

Linda village was located seven kilometers from Sukhum. Nearby, in the Kelassur River area, there was a small German village named Neidorf. A German girl named Irma was in our class. Since the Linda and the Neidorf girls lived nearby, they went home every weekend. One day at the end of September 1941, Irma did not show up at school. Since she had often invited the Estonian girls to come and visit her, we knew where she lived, and decided one Sunday to go and see her. A horrible sight awaited us. The doors of the houses were wide open, dogs were barking in the yards, cats howled miserably, and here and there a cow was lowing. There were huge piles of apples and pears beneath the trees. But not a soul in sight. What had happened? Since the front kept advancing toward Abkhazia, the state decided to deport all the German families. And so we never saw Irma again. That sadness lingered a long time.

In fall 1942 our pedagogical school was evacuated from Sukhum high up into the mountains, to the Abkhazian village of Mokva. No one had notified me. Since times were troubled, I did not make the trip to school on the first of September on schedule. A few weeks after the official beginning of the school year, I received the invitation to come to Mokva, signed by the only Estonian teacher there, Luise Ruubel. To this day I am thankful to her, since it was because of her that I was able to graduate at all. Life in Mokva was quite difficult. We only got 400 grams of cornbread a day, baked without salt. Every day we would await the hour when bread was handed out. We would eat it all at once, drink water to wash it down, and that would be it for the whole day. There was no cafeteria or store. The market was an 18 kilometer walk away, since the buses were not running. The teacher and I stuck together, as we were the only Estonians. When the teacher went home for a visit, she would ask me to keep an eye on her one-room apartment. Sometimes she would feed me, too. One Sunday she invited me along to the Abkhazian villages, where she traded clothing for food. I took along a bed sheet from home and a new pair of cotton socks. In exchange, the villagers gave me two kilograms of corn kernels. On Monday I went to the mill to grind them into meal. The miller

laughed at me and said, "Those kernels will get lost among the stones." I did get a little flour, enough to make porridge a few times.

One of our male teachers was a Russian, but the rest were Abkhazian or Georgian. The Russian teacher would sometimes take us fishing on the banks of a mountain stream. He would catch nice big trout, but for some reason our fishing rods only caught little black burbot. We threw them back in the river. The teacher shared his fried fish or fish soup (*uhhaa*) with us anyway. In the spring that teacher suddenly disappeared, and we soon heard that he had been arrested. Why, we did not know, but we were very sorry.

The dormitory at Mokva was a large room in an old church, big enough to fit all six girls in the class and a few students from the Abkhazian course. All of the boys from our class had been mobilized. There was no stove in the room. We built one out of bricks and a sheet of tin, hot coals on top of that. We would sit in a circle around it warming our hands and feet, telling stories, laughing and even singing. I remember one time when our class was invited to a gathering with the Abkhaz young people in the neighboring village. Before the evening meal, we were asked to wash our hands thoroughly and then invited to table. On the table was a bowl of cornmeal porridge, bean sauce (*lobio*) and milk. We sat waiting for forks and spoons. The teacher smiled and said they used their fingers here. After the meal we again had to wash our hands. At bedtime the mistress of the household (who was past middle age) called us into the kitchen one by one and asked us to sit down. On the floor was a bowl with warm water, and she washed our feet. We felt uncomfortable and ashamed, but we had to respect their customs of hospitality.

We did our practice teaching in a tiny Russian elementary school about 9 kilometers away from the pedagogical school, coming and going on foot, regardless of the weather. This was one of the hardest years of my youth. Not everyone made it, and some left the school in the middle of the year. But I must admit that I have never felt that things were impossibly difficult, not during my youth, the war, or even later on. There are always problems in life, but good sense and optimism are the best means to find a way through.

I graduated from the pedagogical school in spring 1943. It was no easy trick. Georgian language was truly difficult, especially since they used a different alphabet. I got a 4 on the oral part of the examination, but only a 2 on the written essay. The teacher was very understanding,

and, knowing that I would hardly have practical use for the language in the future, gave me a final grade of 3. To this day I can read and write Georgian a little, and sing two songs, but I cannot carry on a conversation.

It was Grandfather's wish that I go to university after I graduated. Since clothing was a serious problem, I decided to go to work first to earn some money to buy clothes, a decision I later regretted. I went to work for three years as a primary school teacher in Salme village, at first in the first and third grades, later in second and fourth. Again my supervisor was Ella Jänes. When she was free, the school director, Lia Aronovna, sent her to observe my lessons, and to give me tips and instruction, which were very helpful.

Even though my youth fell in hard times—repressions, war, bad harvests—youth is still youth, and young people want to sing, dance, and have a good time. During the war the village community center was not in operation, and the building itself was already quite old. But we young people always found a way to go dancing. Adler village was 16 kilometers away from Salme. If we did not have any luck hitchhiking, we would have to walk. It was the same on the way home. We would get home at four or five in morning, sleep for three to four hours, and hurry out to work in the *kolkhoz* fields. That was how the summers went.

Later on we decided to gather the young people in the area and organize dance parties in the farms, where there was more room. We would often go to my uncle Aleksander Tiismus' house. He was a survivor of Siberia, one of the few who came home again after ten years. There was a large parlor in his house. The two sons in the family, Hugo and Konstantin, had good singing voices. Konstantin enjoyed playing the accordion for dances. My uncle's wife Helmi was enthusiastic about young people's gatherings, where we danced, sang, and played all kinds of parlor games.

We had our own singing ensemble, a trio composed of myself, my sister Helmi, and my friend Leili Kalmus. When we performed at dances, we would accompany ourselves on the guitar. There was also a young people's theatre group. We diligently studied the play *Masha*, with myself and my cousin Hugo in the lead parts. For some reason I cannot recall, we never performed it.

On those evenings, my friendship with my future husband developed. For the first time in my life I heard the most beautiful words in

the world, “I love you...I am so happy,” and had my first kiss. Since there was so little tenderness and romance in our young lives, this tiny bit of it left an unforgettable feeling.

On 29 July 1946, I married Feliks Madison, my former classmate, who was from Sulev village. Since the tides of war had taken him to Estonia, I traveled to Estonia with him in October 1946, and we settled in Kilingi-Nõmme. At first I was very disappointed in Estonian winters. On the Black Sea coast it seldom snowed, but when it did, it was such a heavy snowfall that in the morning one could not get out of the house. It took some doing to wade through the thick snow to get to work. And so I imagined that here in the north, there would also be snow up to one’s waist. Not so! My first winter there was so little snow that sometimes it hardly covered my shoes. The natural surroundings were also totally different—lovely white birches, pines, and fir trees everywhere. On the Black Sea coast it had been quite a task to find a tree for the New Year’s holiday.

In Estonia, it seemed that there were people everywhere, and they were dressed more stylishly. I was impressed by the Finnish sleds; every other person in Kilingi-Nõmme seemed to ride around on one in wintertime. I had never seen such a thing before. But at school I did not notice any particular differences—children are children, everywhere the same.

As soon as I settled in to my new lodgings, I went to the school-house in hope of finding a job. But the school was already fully staffed, and that year I remained unemployed. The next fall, the principal of the Kilingi-Nõmme school sought me out at home to recruit me to be senior pioneer leader. Since I was expecting my first child, I could not go to work. Neither had I been a Young Communist, so I could not take the job of senior pioneer leader. And now, at the age of 22, I joined the Komsomol, in order to get a job that fall at the school.

When I visited the office of the Pärnu Komsomol committee, they cross-examined me thoroughly as to why I had not applied for membership earlier, while I was working in Salme village, for example. That made the whole deal unpleasant for me. I should say that the Komsomol was a good deal more active in Estonia in those years than it had ever been in Abkhazia. My husband had been a member of the Komsomol before, and he attended many interesting functions, and that of course stimulated my interest even more. A young woman with a lively temperament does not want to sit at home alone.

On 1 September 1948, I began working as senior pioneer leader at the Kilingi-Nõmme high school. Getting a job was very important to me, since my husband and I were both orphans, and began our life together virtually from scratch. It was a rough start, since I had no experience whatsoever as a senior pioneer leader, and no idea how to begin working with 20 pioneers. My Estonian language skills were also lacking. I did not know the words for “group,” “team,” and “meeting.” My main guide was an Estonian language handbook for senior pioneer leaders, and I familiarized myself with this thoroughly. My goal was to make the work interesting for the children. There were two Young Communists¹¹ from the tenth grade assigned to help me. One of them played the piano. That fall we began preparations for the Young Pioneers’ jamboree to be held in Pärnu in the summer of 1949, and this kept us busy for the whole year. To raise funds, we organized an evening of performances, prepared a play, gymnastics exercises, dances, and songs. At our first evening performance in the Kilingi-Nõmme cultural centre, the electricians let us down; all of a sudden the whole building went dark. The children were resourceful, and quickly ran to homes nearby, borrowed petroleum lamps, and the party went on. Our second fundraiser was organized at the Allikukivi cultural center, and again we had bad luck. No one came to see the performances, but there was a long line at the door for the dance. We decided not let anyone into the dance without a ticket. The young men began to protest and even threatened to take us to court: it was not permitted to sell tickets for the dance separately. For a short while we closed the doors of the cultural center and conferred among ourselves. Luckily the threats remained just threats, and we decided to sell one ticket per couple. With the two fundraising evenings we raised over 800 rubles, which at the time was a large amount. By spring there were 45 pioneers. The parents gradually began to take an interest in our activities, and to help us out as best they could.

Before the provincial pioneers’ gathering there were regional and city inspections. Our school’s pioneers made a great showing. However, I forgot to remind the children that they should wear their kerchiefs at the gathering, and half were missing. They discussed this issue in the regional Komsomol committee and found this to be a serious flaw in my work, and thus our group was left off the list of the outstanding pioneers.

¹¹ Members of the Komsomol.

The whole group attended the Pärnu provincial gathering except for two boys who had been punished for bad behavior. With the help of the parents we were able to obtain a bus. The children and I all had a good time! I especially remember the parade on Victory Square, with airplanes overhead showering us with flyers. There was also the talent show in the *Kursal*,¹² and a boat ride in the bay. For many of the children it was the first time they had seen the sea. Our hard-earned money lasted us for the whole trip, and there was even some left over to buy ice cream. The pioneers were very happy that they had earned such an enjoyable trip to Pärnu.

My husband worked as the director of Kilingi-Nõmme's machine and tractor depot.¹³ On 1 January 1949, he was assigned to work in Pärnu for the provincial Komsomol committee, and this meant that I had to stop working at the Kilingi-Nõmme high school. When I left at the end of the school year, the parents were sad, saying, "You got the pioneer work going, and now you are leaving us behind!" But there was no choice.

In the summer of 1949, I moved to the lovely city of Pärnu, where I have been living ever since. On 1 September I went to work in Pärnu's Middle School No. 1 as senior pioneer leader and Estonian teacher in the Russian-speaking lower grades. Working as a senior pioneer leader here was more complicated, since there were many parallel classes in the seven-grade school, and that meant over 200 pioneers. It was not until my third year of work, when the group grew to 600 members, that the school was assigned a second senior pioneer leader. Official directives indicated that the main emphasis was to be on organizing interesting activities, such as nature hikes and field trips to factories and industrial plants. Subject area meetings in history and mathematics were in fashion for awhile, organized and led by the specialty teachers. We also organized joint meetings with Estonian and Russian schools. I can also remember some of the difficulties. Once I proposed that the grade four pioneers organize a friendship evening with the fourth grade of a Russian school. Two of the best male students in the class were categorically against this. We learned songs and poems in Russian, as well as some Russian dances. The boys did finally show up at the joint

¹² Main hall of the spa building, from the beginning of the 20th century.

¹³ The machine and tractor depot lent out tractors to *kolkhozes*, since not every *kolkhoz* owned a tractor.

meeting, and the event went swimmingly. The Russian children did presentations in Estonian. Finally we played games together, danced, and exchanged handmade gifts. When I went to school the next day, the two boys who had been opposed to the meeting were waiting for me, and announced they wanted to make plans for a joint athletics meet. I was very happy about this.

We also had to organize meetings with political content. The younger children studied Lenin's childhood and school years. I remember that in one third grade, where I taught Russian, there was a very diligent boy named Avo, who got only the highest grades and behaved impeccably. One time the boys said to me, "Avo is the Lenin of our class." What was wrong with that? The other boys took him to be a role model.

It is all well and good to say, as they do today, that the student organizations of the "previous era" were wrong about their ideological orientation, but they did succeed in attracting the students and prepared them for life. Youth organizations in the schools have not gotten going these days. Is this not one of the reasons why criminal activity among youth is rising steadily? It is especially important to channel the energies of fifth to eighth grade boys.

As mentioned earlier, my first daughter, Silvia, was born in 1947. My daughter Sirje was born in Pärnu in 1950, and my son Viktor in 1957, also in Pärnu. While I was expecting my third child I was already 31 years old, and decided to quit working as a senior pioneer leader. This kind of work demanded a good deal of free time, playing along with the children, and I did not have that much free time any more. Besides, I felt a little too old for this kind of work.

Now, having accepted the position of supervising teacher in a large first grade, I was struck by panic. 40 pairs of eyes looked back at me from across the room, each with their own wishes and personality. I had a three-and-a-half month old nursing baby waiting for me at home. I took him to the day-care center on 1 September, and now he was more often sick than well. I remember how I cried during the first few weeks at home and thought about escaping from the school altogether. My younger daughter entered the first grade that fall, and she needed help with homework, especially with reading. Luckily the child's father took an active role in teaching her, since I had no time at all for it. Gradually I started getting used to my little pupils, and life began to take a normal aspect. Thinking back on it, I was amazed that I had been able to work as a senior pioneer leader for that long.

As a teacher my aim was to give the children a solid foundation in basic subjects—their mother tongue, mathematics, and Russian language, and in most cases I achieved my goal. This could be seen in the students' results in school-wide examinations in skill levels. Once I missed a day of school and my substitute was P, the school's most experienced senior teacher. When I returned, the teacher said to me, "Your students are politically stupid." In private conversation I told her that despite the fact that I myself was a Party member, I had never set myself the goal of raising children in the lower grades to be communists.

At one meeting of the city Party executive committee, the curriculum supervisor Valeria Kaljo said, "Teacher Madison is one of the few whose heart is in her work." That was true, but I also had my weaknesses. My major fault was that I could not stay calm in complicated situations, and would get upset and raise my voice. When there were conflicts or thefts, my skills failed me, and I had to pay the price. But it was interesting that the same boys that caused headaches for me at school, later became fine young men. They are often the ones who remember their first teacher. A few years ago my doorbell rang, and at the door stood a tall young man who asked if he could come in. I thought for a minute and then recognized him: thirty years ago E had been my pupil, definitely not one of the easy ones. The young man explained why he had come. While studying in my class, he had once stolen 13 rubles of the pupils' food money from my purse. Since I was unable to figure out who the thief was, I had to pay the money myself. For that money, E had bought himself a pair of skis and a large cake that he had eaten himself. Now, thirty years later, he had come to make amends and pay back the money. He also told me that he was married and the father of six children. During the summers E spent his time working with children who were growing up without love. For this purpose he and his wife had refurbished his grandfather's farm and turned it into a Christian summer camp, which was supported by the children's aid center and Swedish funds. There had been a story in the newspaper about his good deeds. I asked how he was managing to support such a large family. He said that he was a religious person, and that he relied on God's help.

Of course I refused to take the money from him, and suggested that he buy his children sweets, and say his former teacher had sent them. We hugged one another and both of us cried. I said I had forgiven him for what he had done. I was delighted that my one-time

nemesis had turned into a good man, and a fine father to his children. It is heart-warming when former students remember you years later.

I worked in the school a total of 32 years. The happy days far outnumbered the worries. I have no regrets, and if I had to do it over again, I would still choose to be a teacher. By nature I am a bit too conscientious, honest and precise. I have never wanted to lie. I have wanted to live my life with inner fire, rather than a smoldering flame. I did my work and shared my experience with others. I participated regularly in local and republic-wide continuing education, and twice I attended Soviet Union-wide pedagogical courses in Leningrad and Kiev. Once I was sent as Estonia's only representative to give a talk at a USSR-wide seminar in Moscow. I received many awards, including the Order of the October Revolution, which I sold during the New Independence Era when I was short on money.¹⁴

All three of my children have graduated from university: Silvia from the architecture department of the Tallinn Art Institute; Viktor in industrial art at the same Institute, and Sirje from the Pedagogical Institute in the department of early childhood pedagogy and psychology.

We did have some hard days at the beginning of our marriage. My husband belonged to the Komsomol, and soon joined the Party. In his younger years he did mostly Komsomol and Party work. I did not experience harassment because of my parents' fate, except for the reproaches at the time I joined the Komsomol and later when I applied to travel abroad. Repeatedly I was warned, "Your slate is not clean." It was not until 1978 that I was given the chance to take a four-day trip to Finland organized by a friendship society. But my husband did encounter problems due to the political past of my parents, whom he had never known nor even met. He never left that space blank in his applications. Twice he was fired from work on account of my parents. Later the Pärnu City Party Committee sent him to Tallinn to study at the Party Academy. When he had been there for two months, I ran into a young man, comrade Rebas, who had once visited Abkhazia, had met me there and, while in Salme village, apparently investigated my parents' fate. Now, when he heard from me that my husband was studying in the Party academy, he immediately went to the Party Central Committee and registered a complaint, which resulted in my husband being

¹⁴ New Independence Era: the post-Soviet period after 1991, when Estonia was once again an independent republic.

thrown out of the Party Academy. A few years later, two more attempts were made to send my husband from Pärnu to the Party Academy, but a little while later he was thrown out, again because of a stupid accusation on account of my parents. Naturally, such matters severely affected the nervous system of a young, successful man, and created tensions at home. In order to try to improve the situation, I joined the Party, too, but this did not help matters any. My husband finally put an end to his Party work, and decided to work in industry. After a few years of retirement, he succumbed to a severe illness in the fall of 1990.

At the age of 64 I began studying Finnish, and enjoy socializing with Finns. They have a spirit of good will, helpfulness and consideration. One of my first acquaintances was a Finnish singer, who has taught me many Finnish songs. When the singer and his wife come to Pärnu, he and I perform together at the Health sanatorium in Pärnu, where most of the clients are Finns. Our voices make a good combination. In the summer of 1997 that couple arranged a free trip for me to central Finland, where I was their guest for 17 days. This was the loveliest vacation of my life. Even though I had already been to Finland six times, it seemed that I was living in a fairy tale. I enjoy spending time with people, as I do not like to be alone. Good company and my many friends are as necessary to me as fresh air.



Valter Lehtla

BORN 1924

A journalist once asked me the question: “What do the people think of you as a former ‘Red Baron?’”¹ I answered that I was a Red Count. The title of baron was too low for me. I was the director of Estonia’s largest state farm for 34 years. In the West a count’s lands are measured in acres; my domain far exceeded 50,000 acres: it was 21,800 hectares.

I come from a hereditary farm Metsahansu No. 13, in the village of Läsna in western Viru county. I was born on Friday, 8 August 1924. My mother had wanted to name her son Harry. In her youth she had served for over ten years in St. Petersburg, as the housemaid of an Englishwoman. The local schoolmaster thought it was more appropriate to name a child after his father, Walter. On my fourth-grade report card my name is written as Valter. Our family name was also changed from Jürgens to Lehtla.²

My earliest childhood memory is of a horse bolting when it saw an automobile. I was about to turn four at the time, and my sister Jeanne was two years old. We were playing on the doorstep of our home, twenty paces or so from the Tallinn–Narva road. By the roadside there was a pharmacy and a store. A man from the neighboring village had just tied his horse to a post and gone into the pharmacy. When the horse

¹ “Red Baron” (*punaparun*), popular nickname for *kolkhoz* and *sovhoz* directors, alluding to titles in the Baltic-German aristocracy. Count (*krahv*) was a higher rank than baron (*parun*). Also connotationally relevant is the term *hallparun* (Gray Baron), a pejorative term for an Estonian farmowner, and in the Soviet era, meaning roughly the same as kulak.

² Estification of names; movement in the 1930s for Estonians to degermanify family names, in keeping with other national-minded activities See Glossary.

saw the roaring “monster” churning up the dust, it broke the rotten post and charged toward our house. My sister and I fell down behind the steps. To my mother’s relief we escaped with only a fright. Soon automobiles would become an ordinary sight.

Before New Year’s in 1935 our school director, Käsper Tali shared an interesting thought with the children: you will live to see the beginning of the third millennium. My benchmate Endel and I are the only ones left among the boys of our class. From the class that came right after us, no one is still alive. All the girls from both classes are probably still among the living, since women generally outlive men. Most of the boys born in 1924–25 fell victim to the war or to the Red Terror.

All of our farm’s income and my father’s additional earnings went toward raising new farm buildings. One could always scrimp on food and tighten one’s belt, and to cut back on what was already very modest spending. I did clearing work, seeding, and planting in the state forest. I paid 30 crowns of the money I earned for a pair of boots at the Viitna fair. For the school Christmas party, Father made me footwear with pointed toes out of a pair of my mother’s shoes. He called them “dancing shoes.” I left the party plenty early, climbed into bed, pulled the covers over my head and sulked for a long time. I never wore those shoes again. Later on I did get real shoes, and then I danced folk dances with Valve at the school graduation party. I did not have much of a chance to try out any other dances, since, as a member of the village band, I had to be “sawing” away at my violin at the front of the hall. On one dance night at the village hall I was challenged by a “rival,” a village boy four years older than me named Veeliks, who was backed up by a gang of other village fellows. Without warning or introduction he punched me in the face. That was the only time in my life that I allowed anyone to hit me.

In the eyes of the people, the arrival of Red Army troops to occupy their bases in October 1939 was inevitable, a consequence of the war in Poland. The Red Army was more hated than feared, because of their overall smelly unkemptness: filthy uniforms, stinking gasoline, garlic, gun oil, and sweaty foot rags. I was a member of the Young Eagles, and could not bear the sight of a Red Army soldier. At the joint summer camp of the Defense League and the Young Eagles at Altja beach on 15–16 June 1940, I was able to touch a three-inch outdoor cannon with my own hands. Three years later I myself was a 75 mm antitank cannon gunner.

In late autumn 1940, and again in May 1941, the youth from Läsna and the surrounding villages were ordered to the schoolhouse for a meeting. County hall representatives came to recruit us for Communist Youth. I said to the other boys, we are not so stupid as to become “bag ladies” (*kompsumoorid*—pun on *kom-noored*, Communist Youth). But some of them were game! Heino, for example evacuated to Russia, and came back in 1945, strutting around boasting about flying an airplane. He went on to become secretary of the Party committee in some district or town or other in southern Estonia. Another one, the Õuna-Mats fellow, took part in the June deportations³ in 1941, and the Forest Brothers did away with him.

All my life I have had the desire to learn. At the end of May 1941 I got orders to appear in Rakvere, to be enrolled in the Reserve Workers’ Trade School. I wanted to study to become a train conductor, so I could see faraway lands and peoples. They did not even hear me out. All they talked about was industrial school. I was ordered to go home and await a written summons to come to school. A few days after the beginning of the war, orders did arrive to present myself at the Kukruse Industrial School.⁴ I was to train to become a miner, but, as was abundantly clear to me, in case things got dicey for the Reds, I was being prepared for “removal” to Russia. I began to lay low to avoid them. It turned out that out of several villages I was the only one they singled out to become a miner. Since I had refused to become a Red leader for my peers, I was punished for my defiance by being sent off to be a miner.

The outbreak of the war caused more excitement than genuine fear among the people. There were high hopes that the war would favor the Germans, and that this would soon result in liberation from Red rule. The destruction battalion truck would ride through the village often, with a light machinegun on the roof of the cabin, armed men with red armbands in the back, and a machine gunner wearing a green helmet. The people said that the machine gunner was Villem Soo, the rural department head of the TSNTK of Viru county.⁵ The truck would usually turn onto the road leading to the Metsanurga villages to trap Forest

³ See Glossary (Deportations).

⁴ See Glossary (Educational system).

⁵ TSNTK translated: Executive Committee of the Council of Workers’ Delegates.

Brothers and terrorize the people in the villages. But the Forest Brothers were also gathering strength. Father had a Japanese rifle that he had brought back from the First World War, equipped with a wide-bladed bayonet; his short carbine was from the days of the War of Independence.⁶ For the two weapons there was a cartridge pouch with 60 cartridges. Father had hidden the weapons for many years under the roof pole of the thatched barnhouse. I discovered them by chance, but later I found the same weapons under the roof of the haybarn, where Father had found them a new hiding place when the new war broke out. I tried to load the cartridges into the magazine, and from there into the barrel. Luckily I had the good sense not to shoot. Father still had time to remove the weapons from the hayloft. I found them in the pasture under a pile of brushwood. The Forest Brothers got them for keeps.

The summer of 1941, the summer of war, was a turbulent time, but exciting for young people. Herbert, one of my classmates, and the tallest boy in the school was found murdered by the Reds. The first Germans we met were four advance scouts on bicycles squatting by a campfire, their guns stacked. A German military detachment arrived in Läsna on 8 August 1941, my 17th birthday. Our own Forest Brethren brought up the rear. Endel's older brother Valdur, a leader in the Defense League⁷ and the Fatherland Party,⁸ gave a speech from the schoolhouse steps and started organizing a local Home Guard. I joined the Home Guard too,⁹ we went on raid parties and kept watch on the bridge. In the fall of 1942 the front was far away, near Leningrad. I kept guard over the prisoners-of-war working in the peat bog. It was hard to believe anyone would try to escape. But as my luck would have it, an escape attempt occurred during my shift. A Red Army lieutenant and a military doctor fled while the workers at the manor and the prisoners-of-war were eating lunch together. I had worked with the two of them before, in the silo and the grain dryer. From the weeks I had spent as their overseer I knew that these were good men who were trying to do a good job. Maybe they hoped that I would not fire on them when I noticed their disappearance. And they may have been right! My situation might have been dicey at the Rakvere Security Police head-

⁶ See Glossary.

⁷ See Glossary.

⁸ *Isamaaliit* (political party).

⁹ Home Guard, see Glossary.

quarters if the investigator, upon hearing that my home was in Läsna village, had not said, "I have a battle buddy in Läsna from the World War and the War of Independence—Aleksander Jürgens." I replied, "That's my father. Lehtla is his Estonianized name." As I pedaled my bicycle home with a light heart, I thought about how valuable a war friendship could be.

On 15 March 1943, all schoolboys born in the years 1919–1924 were ordered to the Rägavere county hall. Recruitment for the Estonian Legion was underway, and the choices were either state labor service (*Reichsarbeitsdienst*)¹⁰ or work in the war industry. There were no barriers against joining the Eastern Battalion, police guard, or coast guard divisions. Even though the 1926 boys were not called up, and the 1925 boys were not taken until late autumn 1943, Erich Kaasik (1926) joined up with us, "in order not to be less of a man." Before joining the army we were given a chance to finish high school. On 15 May 1943 we stood waiting in front of the Läsna schoolhouse for the truck that would take us to Tallinn. We could sense the tense mood of the people sending us off. I avoided their glances, as if I had something to be guilty about. The women restrained themselves, and there was no weeping and wailing. As I turned to go, Mother's eyes dimmed, and I quickly climbed into the back of the truck. We all tried to be cheerful, even striking up a song as the truck began to move. On the wall of a railway car of the echelon leaving Tallinn someone had scribbled in chalk, "Viru veri ei värise!" (Men of Viru blood do not tremble!). We were on our way to Poland to the *Heidelager* at the foot of the western Carpathians. We belonged to the Third Estonian Volunteer Brigade. The war was to claim at least 8 of the boys from Vaeküla.

A few months later I was an anti-tank cannoneer. When they asked for volunteers for anti-aircraft artillery, I was the first to step forward. The anti-tank training was quite different from infantry; instead of long foot marches we rode on the cannon platform on top of the boxes of shells. We did not have to carry all of our gear on our backs. Instead of jumping up and lying down, we pulled and tugged, pushed and rolled a 75 mm anti-tank cannon. So we sweated hard in the hot summer heat of southern Poland, until we were deemed ready to be sent to the front. Before we went I had to make a trip to the Naumburg weapons factory in Germany, to bring back new "pipes" for the Estonian Brigade.

¹⁰ *Reichsarbeitsdienst*, see Glossary.

On 22 October 1943, we were off, with two platform cars loaded with sand in front of the engine in case of mines from the Russian partisans. For the first time I saw the pathetic huts of Russian villages, the fields overgrown with weeds and brush. The first surge of excitement was soon replaced by the hardships of war: rain and wet snow, soaked clothing and shoes, no place to dry them except on one's own back, sleeplessness, sometimes even hunger. And finally the unavoidable nemesis of front-line soldiers—lice. At the end of January 1944, replacements were sent, and we were pulled back from the front to our supply station. We were housed in tents equipped with bunker stoves. We had a chance to visit the sauna and the barber shop. Instead of the standard soldier's trench coat, cannoneers were issued fur-lined jackets with hoods, which we were very proud of. On our way back from the Nevel front we helped beat back the Russian advance guard by Lake Peipsi. Then our division was loaded into trains at the Tartu station and the echelon began the trip to the Narva front. The closer the train got to Tapa, the stronger the wish grew to pay a visit home. Even though there was a stop at Tapa, I decided to jump off at Kadrina, as the walk home from there was eight kilometers shorter. The train did not stop at Kadrina; it only slowed down. I took a risk and jumped from a moving train. Having tramped twenty kilometers along a road, full of drifting snow, with a heavy backpack, and a machinegun on my shoulder, I arrived home at Läsna. It was a surprise and a great joy to my family to see me again after an absence of ten months: one could especially see it in my mother's eyes.

After a week at home, I decided to move on again: I got to Rakvere on an officer's truck. Having met up with my cannon carriage and its driver at Jõhvi, I stayed on with him waiting for the mechanic who was to arrive any minute, in order to continue on to the Narva river. The waiting dragged on so long that I arrived back in my company after three weeks of absence without leave. Upon questioning, it became clear that I had been listed as missing. Apparently a fallen soldier was easier for a company commander to stomach than a deserter on the run. And so I became a gunner in Corporal Rea's cannon brigade. On the morning of 17 March 1944, when I had begun my shift, the Russian cannons opened heavy fire on the trenches at the riverbank. Because of a poor choice of location the previous night in the dark, only a narrow band of the opposite bank was visible from my cannon. After waiting in vain for the rest of the team to arrive, I decided

to act without orders. There were shells and mines exploding nearby. Mine shrapnel was especially dangerous. In a battle situation, idleness increases the fear of getting hit. So I loaded the cannon, aimed, and fired fragmentation shells at the enemy, descending the opposite bank of the river, over and over again. I forgot my fear! After firing almost 30 fragmentation shells, the cannon stopped operating. The carnage at the river continued. Those who retreated were shot down by our soldiers and by the enemy's *politruks*. When the weather cleared German *stukas* showed up, and by evening the enemy had been beaten back. It was later said that in that and a later battle (the one that began on 25 July), the only Estonian brothers fighting on the opposite side were the heavy artillery divisions of the Estonian Rifle Corps. I met up with the members of my team hiding in the woods behind a patch of woods under fire.

On 12 May 1944 those being penalized for being absent without leave were ordered into the trenches at the riverbank to wait for an attack. It was a lovely sunny morning. Beyond, above the enemy side a large flock of birds was heading north. We were bareheaded or wearing light caps. Suddenly we heard the "kohva-kohva" sound of an approaching large-caliber shell, and there were two heavy explosions almost simultaneously. A huge pillar of earth and mud shot up, followed by a shower of shell fragments. One finger-sized, ragged-edged shell fragment, falling directly from above hit me and nicked my head through my cap. I escaped virtually unwounded, but due to the concussion was excused from the rest of my three-week penalty.

On 24 July 1944, we took up our positions near the city of Narva at the east end of the Pritska pine forest. Our task was to halt the enemy's advances, while the other divisions made their retreat. We were a motorized unit, and we were to be among the last to retreat. I was busy with my motorcycle. The company commander Raimond Ringvee had designated me as motorcycle messenger, replacing a boy from Rakvere killed a few days before by a Russian fighter plane. Of course the "Red Eagle" knew that only important orders and messages would be sent by motorcycle. For the same reason they did not hesitate to fire on a single running soldier. My mind was on the folks at home, since the next morning I was to get my leave papers. Two liters of "Altwater," my vacation liquor, were already in my backpack. I was intensely homesick, even though it would have been fun to ride a motorcycle. One more night! In the early morning on 25 July, all hell broke loose. The

west bank of the Narva River boiled like hell's cauldron, and soon the shells and mines started exploding farther back, near the cannon positions. We were not sure whether this was the continuation of the Auvvere battle begun the previous day, or whether the Russians had already broken through to the Blue Hills (Sinimäed). We had spent the night in a farmhouse with flagstone walls. Ringvee ordered my bottles on the table, declaring, "Your vacation, boy, is over anyway." Everyone in the room got only a couple of swallows of dilute, 32 degree German liquor, but the men's mood was a good bit more cheerful.

In the predawn darkness of 26 July, we, too started our retreat toward the Blue Hills. I even hauled the motorcycle that had gotten hit on the cannon platform to Voka, where our machinery and weapons were being repaired. Hell's cauldron was simmering in the Blue Hills. During the day, clouds of smoke and dust hovered uninterruptedly over the hills. In the dusk of evening Russian mobile artillery came, bearing reactive minethrowers, which wrought their havoc and disappeared, to return the next evening. Wave after wave of fighter planes attacked the Blue Hills. We could not see the tanks, which stayed on the heights on the opposite bank. But despite huge losses and numerous victims, the Russians were unable to conquer the Blue Hills.

Under cover of darkness on the evening of 18 September, we began our retreat from Krivasoo. The Tartu front had been crushed, and we had to give up the positions we had been fighting over for the last seven months. If during our retreat to the Blue Hills there was still the hope that the Western nations would not allow Estonia's occupation (after 10 August the Red Army refrained from attacking the Blue Hills), now no hope remained. The men were in a dark mood. We were silent and gloomy. I got ahead of the others on my motorcycle. The roads were choked with wagon trains. I waited for the others, since the artillery carriages moved much more slowly. Besides, on a motorcycle it was sometimes possible to pass them. In the Kullenga woods I met Richard Polt from my home village. While no one could move ahead on the road, Richard and I took off toward Tamsalu. Then we heard cannonfire and machinegun rattling from the direction of Porkuni and Loksa. A fratricidal battle had broken out.

I made a quick decision: "Enough is enough! Let's go home!" We continued along the road alongside the railway. Near Tapa we rested for a bit in the bushes until it got dark. We wanted to circumvent the town, but we got lost. Then we were lucky enough to get through the town,

and to cross the river Valgejõgi, the water up to our necks. Soon we were on the Loobu road. From Tapa to Riks' home was 26 kilometers, to mine 28. I could not go home, since the Red Army was already streaming toward Tallinn, and I had no intention of crossing paths with them. At dawn on 22 September 1944, we got to Riks' home. After eating our fill we were resting on the attic floor. Suddenly Riks' sister Laine ran into the room: "The Russians came into the kitchen!" Riks and I crept across the yard to the hayloft. Johannes, Riks' older brother by three years, was already home wearing civilian clothes. Quiet as mice and huddled in the chaff we soon heard a shot, and, trembling, waited for what would come next. That morning we had already thrown our weapons into the river, war's over. Then the master of the house came: "They shot Juss!"¹¹ The same night we got our weapons and ammunition from the stream, and headed for the hay meadows near my house, where we hid out for three weeks. When orders were issued in the village for all residents to register, we were smart not to become Forest Brothers. But we oiled our weapons, wrapped them carefully, and buried them; the same with the ammunition. When I saw my mother again, I got the full drift of her worry for me—her hair had gone completely gray.

On 13 October 1944, I got a job at the Loobu forest district as an office clerk. They thought that a boy with glasses would be better suited for such work than for handling a two-man saw. A few days later I was in the Rakvere War Commissariat along with the younger men from the forest district. We were questioned thoroughly and everything was written down. I gave an honest account of my service in the German army. The second call came just before Christmas. My companions said there was no point in telling them that I had joined the Legion in spring 1943, better to say I was mobilized in February of 1944. The same day we were handed a mobilization order for 23 December. We decided to celebrate the holidays at home, and extended our holiday a bit until Epiphany. But while hiding out in my aunt's little house in the forest, the machinegun I brought back from the Nevel front within easy reach between the bed and the wall, I got sick. Father took his son, who had a high fever, to see the district doctor in Undla. After hearing Father's explanation of my circumstances, Dr. Espenberg put me to bed in his own apartment. When I reappeared at the commissariat after my recovery, I found out I had been listed as a deserter, and was ordered to

¹¹ Nickname for Johannes.

report to my unit the next day. I said I was ready to go immediately; there was no point in putting the horse through another 75 kilometer trek. I was surprised by the sudden change in military commissar Purro's attitude: he ordered an extension order written up for me. It turned out that the mobilization quotas had been fulfilled without counting me in, and I was given an extension until the end of the war. On the document it stands written: "Has not served in the army." And that was how I wrote it from that time on in my official *anketa*.¹²

In July the forest district workers were "checked over" by a security police officer from Tallinn. That time they recorded yet a third, even simpler version of my biography. But it became increasingly clear that I needed to find work farther away from home. I turned to Alma Imakaevu, my teacher from Vaeküla days, and got the job of director of the experimental farm at the Ravila Gardening- and Home Economics School. When sending me off to Ravila that same day, Miss Imakaevu said, "There is a wonderful teacher at Ravila—Miss Rehe. You can always turn to her if you need help." That night as I entered the school office the first thing I saw was a small, pretty, unpretentious-looking young schoolteacher leaning against the warm stove. I took a liking to her immediately. At the time I could not guess that I had just met my future wife, and the future mother of our sons.

Our romance began on New Year's Eve 1946, when I kissed her for the first time. With every day my wish to marry her grew stronger. That she was older than me was no obstacle. It even made me more defiant—I wanted her for myself, whatever the others might think. I went home to Läsna with Leeni's photograph. Father and Mother gave me a pair of wedding rings that they were not wearing. In the wagon on the way home from meeting Leeni's bus at the county hall, I took Leeni's hand and slipped the ring onto her finger. This was a surprise to Leeni—that was how I proposed to her. As a public declaration of our engagement we wore the rings on midsummer eve, and went with the others to weed thistles from the collective wheat field. This was somehow symbolic of our future life together, since we were to "poke the thistles" of everyday life together for many years before we could start living like human beings.

The marriage of the schoolteacher and the manor overseer was registered by the Ravila county clerk on 21 July 1946. Afterwards

¹² *Anketa*, see Glossary.

Leeni and I went to visit my parents in Läsna, where they gave their daughter-in-law a warm welcome. Perhaps it seemed to them that our age difference was not much greater than theirs, since Leeni looked so youthful and pretty. Leeni had been confirmed at the appropriate time, but I had missed the confirmation because of the war. To have a church wedding I had to be confirmed, too. At the Kose pastor's office it turned out that confirmations were over for that year, but he was willing to give me private lessons. He gave me chapters and verses to study at home, and I was to come to him two or three times to repeat them. Then one time when I went to the parsonage, he said he would confirm me that day. Together we sang the required songs, emptied the wine goblet between the two of us, and I was given the important document needed for the wedding and for the christenings of our future sons. With that I had the courage to go to Türi to visit my future mother-in-law and father-in-law. I have the fondest of memories of these very warm people, enough to last a lifetime. No man could ask for a better mother-in-law!

In September 1946, Leeni and I decided to leave Ravila. The director of the Kuremaa Livestock Farming College and his wife, a teacher, had known Leeni since working together in Paide. Leeni got a job as a teacher and head of the dormitory, I as the senior agronomist for the Kuremaa teaching farm. My salary was now three times what it had been in the forest district. Until this point Leeni had had the higher salary, since in Ravila she had also had the job of department head, but now I could already feel like the head of the family. But even at Kuremaa we could not get by without a potato patch and a wheat field. We also started keeping a pig. At first our lodgings were in the manor building, a year later we moved to the experimental station (*katsejaam*), but there were no creature comforts there, since the plumbing was in disrepair. Our first child, Tõnu, was born on 14 June 1947. Tõnu's birthday fell on the 6th anniversary of the June 1941 deportation, a matter the people refused to forget. The birth of our second child happened during distressing days; 24 March 1949. Leeni was awaiting the birth at her father and mother's house in Türi, where medical help was close at hand. I got the happy news of the birth of my second son from my father-in-law—but not until the morning of 28 March. For three days all the telephones in Estonia had been dead. I had tried to call Leeni's father on the morning of 25 March, but no one came to answer the switchboard in Palamuse. I thought the phone was out of order and went to the post

office. The official there expressed concern that something was wrong. They could not get a connection to the switchboard, either. We had no time for a longer conversation: I noticed Red Army soldiers jumping off sledges right in front of the post office. With a tall officer leading the way, they immediately headed for the back of the building, where the second door led to my apartment. The thought flashed through my head: they have come for me! There seemed to be no other way to look at it. A few minutes later the same officer reappeared and walked along the road toward a building where there were a number of apartments on the second floor. I thought of disappearing. But where to? They would find Leeni and the children in Türi anyway. I turned back toward the main road, and walked right toward the approaching deporter. I must have been agitated, and did not immediately realize what the story was when the officer spoke to me in Russian. When he asked a second time whether there were women's boots for sale in the local shop, I shook my head, I don't know. The young woman teacher from the next apartment, Viivi Eelmäe, was sent to Siberia.

I loved Leeni very much, even more so as the mother of our two children. I always took Leeni along to gatherings and dances. She danced beautifully. She had a pleasant high soprano voice and sang for many years in a mixed choir. Though she was a city girl, she managed the cattle and the milking very well. When we made firewood with a two-man saw, her hand was as light at sawing as her step on the dance floor. When we settled in Kuremaa, there was no electricity yet; I brought in a diesel electric station from Kehtna. In September 1948, I had hired a boy from my home village as field brigadier in the teaching farm. But in December Endel was arrested, and they nabbed me on my way from Jõgeva to Kuremaa. At the KGB headquarters they interrogated me for several hours, pounding their fists on the table, waving a pistol under my nose, and threatening to shoot me. They were not as interested in Endel as in his two older brothers. I held staunchly to my story: during the German occupation I had spent two years studying in the Work Supervisors' School at Vaeküla, and worked there in the summers as well. So I couldn't have known anything about Endel's brothers. Toward morning they let me go.

On 1 January 1949, they cut my job at the teaching farm. The Estonian Communist Party's first secretary Nikolai Karotamm's newspaper article about the development of agriculture in Estonia and the coming of *kolkhozes* motivated me to go back to being an agronomist.

My studies at Vaeküla as well as my work as an agronomist in Kuremaa had convinced me of the advantages of large-scale agricultural production; Karotamm's article raised hopes that this could be achieved through collective farms. But at the *kolkhoz* I soon noticed that the men were huddling together, passing a bottle around, and talking about things they did not share with me. The main motto of my leadership became a quotation from Lenin: "In the end, what matters most for the victory of the new social order is work productivity." I found out the real truth about Lenin too late in the game.

At the end of August 1949, after working for a few months in my home *kolkhoz*, I applied for a job at the ministry of *sovhozes*. I was sent to the Lammasküla *sovhoz*, to fill a vacant position as senior (head) agronomist. Jaanus, the deputy minister, openly warned me that the farm was poor, with respect to soil quality and financial situation: the soil was sand and gravel on top of limestone, and there were losses every year. The *sovhoz* could only survive on state support. Despite this, I decided in favor of Lammasküla, since the train station was nearby, and it was easy to get to Türi and Olustvere by rail. I was sworn into my new job on 1 September 1949. My salary increased by a third compared to what I got at Kuremaa. At that point I had no idea that I would work at that farm for over 40 years, and that a half a century later I would still be a resident of Rakke county.

I set to work with vigor and enthusiasm. The agronomist of that poor *sovhoz* must soon have caught the approving attention of the bosses, since after only a few years the cadres department of the ministry began to offer me the post of director, first in one state farm, then in another. On 29 April 1952, the Estonian Communist Party Central Committee bureau appointed me director of the Rudolf Pälson *sovhoz*, which had been created by merging two farms, the Lammasküla and Pälson *sovhozes*. I should mention that twice I attempted to change the name to Rakke *sovhoz*, but this was not successful until *perestroika*, under the administration of my successor, Arvi Tõrva. When I became director, my salary remained the same as what it had been as head agronomist (980 rubles a month in the currency of the time).

In June 1952 I graduated with a junior agronomist's diploma as a nonresident student at the Olustvere Agricultural College.¹³ At the

¹³ A non-resident student did not attend lectures at the institution of higher learning, studied independently and only came to campus to take examinations.

time I thought that was as far as my abilities could reach. But in the closing months of 1954, while attending a three month continuing education course in Nizhni-Novgorod by the Volga, my colleague Leonid Taal urged me to take the entrance examinations to the Estonian Agricultural Academy in January 1955. I surprised myself and passed the examinations and became a student in Department of Correspondence Studies. In June 1961, I got an agronomist's diploma from the Estonian Agricultural Academy (EPA) with an average grade of 4.56.¹⁴ A few years later I began postgraduate study at Tartu University. I thought it was important to continue my studies, since I had been appointed head of the experimental station, with special duties in the area of personnel. Even though I had to sacrifice many things while studying and working at the same time, I passed my examinations in Marxist philosophy, political economy, agricultural economy, and German language. However, I never completed my postgraduate degree. I was afraid that the Secretary of the Estonian Communist Party Central Committee would not allow me to defend my thesis, as had happened to one of my friends. My "sins" were a great deal more serious than his were. According to Endel Hansar, the *sovhoz partorg*, a man from my home village named Julius Abo had informed the KGB that I had been an SS volunteer and an officer. This Abo fellow had something against my father, since my father had caught him stealing during his shift guarding the haystacks. I told the *partorg* that I had only been mobilized in February 1944, that I had only been a corporal, and had served as a motorcyclist. The matter was discussed in the district party committee. By this time Khrushchev's thaw was underway, so I was not penalized, but instead was asked to consider joining the Party. After all, the head of a collective must set a good example. Twice already Minister Mette had supported my application for Party membership with his recommendation. It would have been very complicated to struggle against this. I had already been in my director's position five years when I was accepted as a member of the Communist Party in October 1957. My mother reminded me that I had called her a communist in October 1939 when the Russians came in, when she had tried to calm the people in the village by saying that Russians were not bad people. "Now you are a communist yourself!" As director I could achieve much more

¹⁴ On a scale of 1 to 5, 5 being the highest grade.

than I could have as an agronomist. But I was ashamed in front of my mother.

My career as director began with the destruction of the pigsties in a fire on 20 June 1952. It had been an unusually rainy summer and fall, with large losses in the harvest (including 13 hectares of unharvested potatoes). That year was the beginning of economic decline for many *kolkhozes*. The consequence was the partial, and later, the total merging of *kolkhoz* lands with *sovhozes*, with the result that the already poor economic standing of the *sovhoz* worsened, and the losses compounded with every year up to nearly a million rubles. One year people were without wages for four months, even though the production quotas were fulfilled. I suggested that the people left without wages file suit against the director (myself) in court. Some people followed through. Then Soviet Union *sovhoz* minister Benediktov came from Moscow to Toompea. After hearing out the *sovhoz* directors' explanations and justifications (there were about 40 of us), he issued an order to the National Bank to pay out the wages. This was a substantial blow to my self-esteem, but as a result I started making even more of an effort.¹⁵ The work of the *sovhoz* workers bore fruit. Production increased and profits rose; there was no longer any talk of losses. High rewards and premiums were awarded. Our outstanding workers even got several free automobiles from the state. The best of them were given permits to purchase their own cars. In the years 1976–77, profitability based on overall productivity even topped 90%, the best result among all the state farms. A profit of several million (now according to the new currency) allowed for the creation of an incentive fund, and premiums could be paid out to collective farm workers. If there had been no restrictions, we could have paid even more: there was, in fact, enough money. Indeed, there was now consistently enough money in the bank account to cover at least a year's salary. Because of high work productivity the salary level was high (at least a few dozen animal breeders and mechanics earned a higher average yearly salary than the farm di-

¹⁵ The visit on the part of a minister from Moscow constituted a major intervention in the affairs of a Socialist Republic of the USSR. Although Valter Lehtla urged his workers to appeal to the higher authorities to solve the wage dispute, he probably did not expect an intervention of such magnitude. Though the problem was "successfully" solved to the workers' satisfaction, it did leave Valter Lehtla, as the leader of a large *sovhoz*, in the middle, exposing him to some personal unpleasantness.

rector, if one included additional earnings and premiums. The workers' wages were made public, to rule out any suspicion that the staff was being paid a high salary. Since the total volume of production was twice the normal wage level of the highest wage bracket, the salaries of head workers, specialists, and service workers had all reached their ceiling. Upon merging with a large but economically weaker neighboring *sovhoz* in 1978, the size of the farm increased by almost 50%. But even under these conditions, the director's wages stayed the same.

After the merging of the two *sovhozes*, the district authorities were no longer as reluctant to distribute allotments for new buildings. Road repair and the building of new roads were of highest priority, as well as the refurbishing and asphaltting of production centers. Good road conditions allowed the establishment of regular bus transportation between production centers and settlements. Six buses in three shifts on three established routes; travel was at the *sovhoz*' expense. Family residences were built in addition to new production buildings and apartment houses. The *sovhoz* also bought up houses left empty by owners who had moved elsewhere, about 60 of them in all. These and the new family residences were sold at an appropriately low price to permanent *sovhoz* workers. In this way the *sovhoz* was able to stabilize its work force. Long-standing workers at the *sovhoz* were given a pin or medal every five years, as well as a bonus amounting to several months' salary, depending on seniority. A kindergarten was built to accommodate 140 children. A summer theatre seating 1500 was erected in the lovely Rakkemäe valley. At Alajõe, on the north bank of Lake Peipsi, a recreation base was created, as well as an athletic field in Rakke, complete with soccer field and a trampoline for ski jumping. The *sovhoz* was a shareholder in sanatoria at Narva-Jõesuu, Pärnu, and Värskä, and we hosted three republic-wide equestrian meets. There were successes in other areas as well. At two winter sports meets our wrestlers took first place. Without a doubt these achievements brought a sense of fulfillment much more valuable than awards for productivity. But then I got caught.

A letter of complaint had been sent directly to the Kremlin, to Brezhnev himself, calling me a fascist, a womanizer, and an incompetent leader. It was alleged that there was no order in the *sovhoz*: the assistant director had a car accident while driving drunk; the union chairman's son had killed another young man, that the perpetrators had allegedly not been punished, and things had been pushed under

the rug. Lehtla had supposedly tapped into *sovhoz* funds to build himself a summer home. The last accusation was quickly disposed of, since I presented the requisite documents. Alongside the letter of complaint, the district Party committee put on the table a document regarding my service in the German army from 15 May 1943 to 30 September 1944, and evidence of my having belonged to the Home Guard.

They were much more thorough in their search for evidence to substantiate the letter of complaint to the Kremlin, and this time they did find their document, the one they had failed to discover in October 1956. I had nothing more to say in my defense. All I thought about was whether they would merely fire me from the director's post or put me in jail as well. I categorically denied all allegations of adultery (an honest man defends his wife's honor). As pertained to incompetence in leadership, I had remained within my assigned jurisdiction and done what I had to do. I had reported the assistant director's car accident with the *sovhoz* Volga to my immediate superior. I had also appealed to the secretary of the Party committee to have the perpetrator punished, but nothing had been done about it. When I turned the perpetrator over to a court of his peers, the *partorg* had blocked it: "A court of peers does not discuss matters pertaining to Party members." And so it was. I was punished with a Party reprimand for presenting false biographical information. Perhaps my case was made milder by the fact that I held an Award of the Order of Lenin. But year by year, later month by month, my desire to quit the director's post got stronger and stronger. I wanted to work in more peaceful conditions: ordering other people around had never really appealed to me. I had always been more interested in increasing the efficiency of the means of production. My wish to leave my position got even stronger when I narrowly missed being taken to court for what happened in October 1980. This is how it went:

In Estonia's most modern 1150 head dairy farm, complete with a carousel milking machine, specialists from a German firm were just completing the fine-tuning of the machinery and getting ready to leave. A brand new loader truck brought a load of fortified feed. The milking carousel was activated. The cows were poisoned by the feed, and six animals died; luckily, the others were saved. It turned out that the agronomist and the car park director had used the same vehicle to haul blighted seed grain and to load it into seeders. I had just bargained with the ministry to acquire this loader truck for the new

farm, since there was no other way to load the fortified feed into high tower bunkers. At the procurate, the investigator questioned all concerned, and all except the director were able to wriggle free of blame. The procurator would have initiated criminal proceedings against me, and the paragraph of the law prescribed three years in prison. But the Rakvere District Party Committee took over the matter of my punishment, indicating only a reprimand. Civil court proceedings remained in effect, and I had to pay for the cows. The investigator would not close the proceedings until I handed him the bank document showing payment to the *sovhoz* account. I noticed a certain disappointment on that woman's face. That Soviet arbiter of rights would have enjoyed putting a heinous *sovhoz* director behind bars! In the Stalin-Beria era, almost every third or fourth *kolkhoz* chairman connected with our *sovhoz* was imprisoned due to the efforts of such investigators. I was lucky that this was no longer the Stalin era. I can imagine what they could have written into my verdict back then: collaborator with the German occupiers, SS man, squeezed his way into the Party in order to bring harm to Soviet agriculture, aided and abetted the enemies of the Soviet regime (harbored seven former county elders in the *sovhoz*, hired former members of the Defense League and the Home Guard, etc.), turned a blind eye to former SS members, and became one of them himself, refused to hire people of Russian origin. The last allegation was in fact true, since though I had never publicly refused to hire anyone who was unable to speak Estonian, I asked them to find their own housing, since the *sovhoz* did not have apartments to spare. After finding lodgings, they were welcome to return to discuss employment prospects. Not a single one came back.

Without a doubt my very loving wife suffered a great deal from my failures, just as she shared my joy in all my achievements. I tried as best as I could to shield her from unpleasantness, but it was impossible to hide everything. As a city girl with a teacher's vocation, it was not easy for her to tolerate the difficulties that went along with my rural lifestyle, but she never complained. Immediately after our marriage we had lived on two salaries, but there was no work for her at the *sovhoz*; besides, the children were small at the time. For the first year and a half we lived in the house of a deported family, a few kilometers from the *sovhoz* centre, even farther from the schoolhouse. Leeni accepted the cow my parents offered us; we kept a pig, lambs, and chickens, and grew potatoes and vegetables. We lived very thriftily,

especially when we started to save money toward buying a car. Our growing boys also needed more with every passing year. In ten years of marriage, we moved ten times. The second to last apartment, in a new building, needed to be remodeled and we had to put the heating in ourselves. Until I started work in the *sovhoz*, it was unheard of to have an apartment remodeled for a new resident at the *sovhoz*' expense. One was shown the living space, and everything else was up to the resident. As an agronomist, in order to move closer to the *sovhoz* center, I had no choice but to settle with my family in a vacant carpentry workshop and blacksmith's shop; these were moved into the building of a partially rehabilitated starch factory. The carpentry workshop was divided in two with a wooden partition, and the doorway was left intact. In the front area was a huge brick stove, which also warmed the room behind the partition. We moved in on 10 March 1951, when the *sovhoz*' first electric station went into operation. A huge tractor hauling a sledge brought all of our household goods and our whole family, pushing the snow aside into huge piles on both sides, like a snowplow. After that I brought in the livestock. Once again we started to build a home. We scraped the window frames of the blacksmith's shop clean and painted them white. A floor and stove were made at the *sovhoz*' expense. We had barely had time to get this second, larger room fixed up when the director housed a driver assigned to the location for a month. Later when the driver left, and the director wanted to replace him with a Georgian landscape engineer, I was categorically against it. The next year, this time as director, I replaced the partition with a proper wall with a door in it, and a tiled stove with a warming wall (*soemüür*). We wallpapered and painted our new apartment ourselves. I had a load of soil brought to the front yard, and made a lawn with a low fence, so the children would not go wandering off by themselves. We left the apartment in the blacksmith shop at the beginning of 1955, and moved into a brand-new building, which surprised us in its own way. The summer of 1954 had been rainy, and in the course of construction the walls of the brick building had soaked through; they had not completely dried out by the time winter came. It was impossible to heat the kitchen enough to melt the ice on the inside of the outer wall. The four of us lived and slept in a little room 9 meters square, since this was all we could heat. In June of the next year we decided to move to the little town of Rakke, where we were given the Ülesoo house to live in. This farm is referred to as "Toots" farm, since it was the place where Oskar

Luts had started writing “Spring” in Rakke in 1907.¹⁶ This was a suitable location for our home: that same fall Leeni started working as a teacher, and our younger son Toomas started school that same fall. Unlike Tõnu, he did not have to walk eight kilometers a day to school. Fifteen years later, after we bought the house, this would become our permanent home. Remodeling and refurbishing became my primary hobby for the next 10 years.

Visitors began coming to the *sovhoz* both from Estonia and places abroad. For years we had made upkeep of production buildings and green areas our priority. For many years the prize for pig breeding was awarded to the Kõpsta pig farm, which belonged to our *sovhoz*. It seems that all *sovhoz* directors throughout the Soviet Union had so-called sauna-summerhomes built, that is drinking places where one could entertain guests. Our *sovhoz* was probably the only exception in this regard, since even the new clubhouse was not finished until after my retirement, even though the plans had awaited implementation for almost ten years. We made do with the old county hall building, admittedly with a few added comforts (central heating, water, WC). I sat at the director’s desk in that house for 30 years, for much of that time across from the office of the secretary of the *sovhoz* party committee. I explained to curious visitors from Moscow that our *sovhoz* had the highest production of agricultural products per square meter of office space. This always provoked the visitors’ amusement, especially after they had had a chance to familiarize themselves with our exemplary production centers and livestock farms. Our *sovhoz* began its asphalt-ing work at the farthest farm, and completed it at the door of the administration building. The neighboring *sovhoz* never made it past the office door.

I was always entrusted with choosing the candidate for secretary of the *sovhoz* Party committee, and my choice always prevailed. In actuality *sovhoz* Party meetings consisted of production negotiations rather than Party events. After I was accepted to Party membership, I did my utmost to increase our membership among Estonian-minded, educated people. After the Vinni Exhibition-Sovhoz College, our *sovhoz* Party organization was the largest among Estonian rural districts, with over 100 members.

¹⁶ The popular school novel, *Kevade* (Spring) I, II, by Oskar Luts (1887–1953).

When I retired I was freed from a great burden. I had been anticipating that day for a long time. The total time I spent in the director's post was exactly 34 years, calculated back from 30 April 1986, when I signed the document turning over the administration of the *sovhoz*. (Thirty-four years earlier, when taking over the merged *sovhoz*, no one had asked for my signature). I was sent into retirement with a festive celebration. The same was not true of my successor. He started his term as director in more auspicious circumstances, with a much higher starting salary than mine had been. Apparently, unlike me, he had the sense to stand up for himself from the beginning. But when he was finishing his director's career, he had to take part in the fragmentation, privatization-expropriation, decay, and gradual decline of a large collective farm that had been in excellent financial shape at the outset.

Soon after my retirement from the director's post I was reclassified as an "economic worker" (so I could keep my pension) and assigned to edit the *sovhoz* newspaper *Farmer*. When in December 1991 the *sovhoz* could no longer afford the publication of a newspaper (it was distributed free of charge), my service at the Rakke *sovhoz* came to an end.

Since I no longer had additional income, I began to develop my beekeeping skills. By 1995 I had 15 swarms. The summer and early fall of that year were excellent—warm, with the right amount of rain. I got an average of 71 kg honey from each hive, a total of 1,068 kg. This was an extraordinary harvest. After this bountiful year there were two years with average yield, followed by two with poor yield; in 1999, things were very good again: 1,065 kg, that is again an average of 71 kg for every spring family. Thanks to my bees I have been able to manage normally on a modest income. Not only have the bees been a support to me financially and psychologically, but I have enjoyed the health benefits of the honey, pollen, and beeswax as well. My honey consumption is surely at least ten times more than that of the average Estonian.

Four years have now passed since the death of my wife on Christmas Eve, 1995.

Leeni was a wise woman, who knew that the only way to keep a man of my temperament was through kindness and love. Her whole nature was goodness; she was unpretentious and tolerant. I sincerely hope that these traits live on in our grandchildren, whose legacy is the beginning of the third millennium.



Linda Põldes

BORN 1928

My father's father, Juhan Martinson, was born in Saaremaa as the son of a farmhand¹ on the Muratsi estate. He began as a herd boy; during his adolescence years he tended the baron's pack of hunting dogs, and went on to be a stableboy. My father's mother Marie came from a family of free peasants in Muratsi village. Her parents had been able to purchase their land from the baron's estate.² My grandmother was

strong-boned, with long, healthy, black hair that hung down below her hips in braids. Despite her strength, she was tender-hearted. After their marriage Juhan and Marie went to live on a sharecropper's property at Saadu, in the village of Vaivere. My grandfather went to Riga, where they were dredging the river, to earn money toward purchasing his own farm. Five children were born in the family. Grandmother tilled the patch of land, kept a cow, went fishing with the men, and worked as a day-laborer on the estate and on farms. Grandfather stayed in Riga for years, until a load from a lifting crane came loose and fell on him, severely injuring his back. For a long time he lay in bed in a cast, and until the end of his life wore a supportive corset vest stiffened by metal rods. He purchased the Välja-Mihkli farm in Vaivere village.³

¹ Estonian word *moonakas*.

² Peasant landownership cf. Raun p. 68.

³ It is useful to compare the rural life Linda Põldes relates in her life story, especially her descriptions of the family farm and its surroundings with the life stories of Selma Tasane (also from Saaremaa), and Asta Luksepp. A brief account of life in Saaremaa around the same time can be found in Tanni Kents' life story.

The children received their schooling. The eldest son, Gustav-Ernst, finished school with “a gold-lettered certificate of excellence,” which was shown to me as a child. He got the best education possible in Saaremaa. Gustav-Ernst became a ship’s officer. The last news his relatives heard about him came from St. Petersburg, and it was thought that the Bolsheviks did away with him. Karl, the younger son, was killed by mine-shrapnel during the First World War. One daughter, Anette, married the owner of the Koordi farm from the village of Muratsi; Kristiine went to Viljandimaa as servant-girl at a farm, and lived there until old age. When the family was deported, she kept up the farm until their return.

My mother’s father, Karl Lember, was a house servant at the Muratsi manor; my mother’s mother Marie a maid. She was a quiet and modest woman. They met, fell in love and married at the manor. The baron gave the young couple a sharecropper’s plot in return for their good work. Marie and Karl Lember also had five children, one of whom died in infancy. Aleksander was the most fortunate of their children: he did not get caught in the war, and only served in one army, that of the Estonian Republic. Another son, Johannes, suffered from poor health at an early age: he became deaf at the age of 9 as a result of chronic sinus infections.⁴ The youngest son, Rudolf, was a young man with literary interests, who wrote poetry and short tales about the local people; he was mobilized by the Russians in 1940. Later the rumor spread that he had last been seen, weak and flat on his back, during the Leningrad blockade, saying that he would not rise until the junipers grew leaves.

My father, Jüri-Aleksius Martinson, was born in 1894 in Saaremaa, in Vaivere village on the Saadi sharecropper’s property in the fields. His mother had come from sea with a sackful of fish when her labor-pains began. She did not even have time to come into the house, and it all happened in the hedgerow: she gave birth on her own, took the baby into the house, made a fire in the stove, warmed the water, bathed the infant and then lay down for a little while.⁵ In the evening,

⁴ Linda Põldes uses an idiomatic expression here: Johannes “got caught in the gears of life.” Such expressions, along with the use of the term “fate” are important to the interpretation of life stories: they signal the perceived degree of control, agency, and choice that people had concerning their lives (see also Introduction).

⁵ See also Elmar-Raimund Ruben’s opening sentences describing his own birth, and Tanni Kents’ description of her grandmother. A strong Estonian woman

however, she was already tending the livestock and making supper for the children. According to the older people of the village, my father was a lively boy, full of tricks. He got his education in Kuressaare; his peers customarily attended school for three years. Instruction was in Russian.⁶ Then, as always for boys from Saaremaa, there was the lure of the sea. Jüri-Aleksius went to sea on ships named “Kalevipoeg” and “Isabella.” When he left home, his father sent him off with the following words: “Jüri, may all go well with you, but keep this in mind: everyone knows how to make money, but very few know how to handle it.” Those words stayed with him wherever he went. Of course, he also visited the harbor taverns, but he also knew how to pass his time in other ways. The captain had given him a violin as a gift and taught him how to play it. I remember that violin from my childhood, where it stood on the wall above the chest of drawers. In 1926, at the age of 32, my father left the ship and became a landlubber. His mother Marie had died of pneumonia at the age of 49. The farm needed a master. The Estonian War of Independence⁷ and the Saaremaa uprising happened during my father’s youth. At the time he had been on leave from his ship, visiting relatives and acquaintances, and had not heard anything about the uprising. On his way home the White Guard rounded up everybody in sight, including Father. Explanations were of no avail; he had sat in jail for many days, and already they were taking people out of the cell to be shot near Kuressaare at Kellama. Luckily one of his classmates had noticed him and asked, “What are you doing here?” Thanks to him my father escaped. Often my father would remark that during the whole War of Independence he had never stood as close to death as he had in those days. There had been much brutality; people were killed for no reason at all.

My mother, Anna-Adele Lember, was born in 1902 in Saaremaa, in Muratsi village on the Liigundi sharecropper’s farm. Her father was a sea fisherman; her mother kept house. My mother received four years of education at the Vaivere elementary school. Her working life began in childhood as a herding hand, later as a summer farmhand. She worked at the farms of relatives. Her wages were brought home

gives birth on her own in a hedgerow, gets up, and keeps on working.

⁶ From 1880 until the First World War, when Estonia belonged to Imperial Russia, the mandatory language of instruction in schools was Russian.

⁷ Estonian War of Independence 1918–1920.

to her by autumn, usually grain and other foodstuffs. This helped her family to survive the winter. She kept the clothes bought for her by her employer. It was said that Mother had been very pretty as a young girl, and that she had had many suitors to choose from. When my father stopped going to sea, Liigundi Anni caught his eye, and he came a-courting. Father was 32 years old, a well-dressed young man, with a respectable appearance, even though he was already balding. When speaking with Anni, Father was repeatedly rejected, because the young girl had her own favorite. Anni knew that Jüri had an irascible temperament; it was hard to make a choice. When spring came, at the recommendation of her parents, she accepted his next proposal, but with a heavy heart. The most important reason given for accepting him was that he was well enough off that their children would not have to work for strangers at an early age. Their wedding took place in May 1927, in Kaarma church. Mother was 24 years old. Over the course of his years at sea Father had indeed saved a considerable sum of money (in the village he was referred to as a “millionaire”), which enabled him to buy a full wardrobe for his bride, complete with underwear, dresses, coats and even a suit. Bedding, coverlets, and curtains were bought for the wedding chest. According to Mother’s stories, Father owned six suits, four coats, eight hats, etc., all bought abroad; at that time peasants wore garments of homespun wool. Before the wedding the house was remodeled; the windows were enlarged, the ceilings were raised, ovens were built from ceramic tiles, and the floors were painted.

Mother should have been very contented with her lot, but as she had feared, my father had a hot temper and a hard, abrupt nature, and Mother, by contrast, a very soft and yielding one. Life took its course, though there were also some happy days. Mother would always say that it was possible to live with Jüri because his anger passed quickly, and he held no grudges. Father loved order, was very demanding with respect to himself and others, but also generous.

In 1928 on 18 March, a Sunday, I saw the light of day for the first time. I am my father and mother’s first child. Since Father was well able to afford it, I was ushered into the world in the Kuressaare provincial hospital.

After my arrival the family grew by one member each year, and so it went for four or five years straight. First I got a sister, Agnes. The third-born was the eagerly awaited son and heir, Richard; Erich was last. Father was overjoyed when Richard was born. After four

pregnancies in a row and heavy farm-work there was almost nothing left of my mother: she was a thin, exhausted woman. During the first years of their marriage, when my mother had one child at the breast and another growing in her womb, Father hired helpers, both for the summer and year-round. The whole family ate at the same table. I remember the last farmhand, who was with us when I was seven years old; from then on day-laborers were used. In those days my mother's brothers also helped out.

Sows and bulls were kept at the farm. Plans were made to acquire haying and other agricultural machinery. To use them, though, one first had to do battle with the stones of Saaremaa's fields. Father and Mother dragged them out using two horses, and working parties were held to haul stones. A large ditch had to be dug across the fields of several farms in order to make use of the natural meadows and marshland, and a water cooperative was formed, to which my father belonged. In the beginning, summer wheat was grown on the new land, later hay. The wheatfield was as high as a wall. Machines were bought one by one—first a horse-driven hay rake, then a Swedish hay mowing machine, with an attachment for grain-gathering. Rye and wheat were bound into sheaves by hand. By then we were old enough to run around gathering the cut grain, and get it out of the horses' way before they made another round. My father set great stock by his horses, and ours were beautiful. Father even had dreams of a small tractor, but that era came to an end, and many plans remained unfulfilled.

By Saaremaa standards Välja-Mihkli was a large farm, 58 hectares. The plan was to divide it between the two sons. My childhood home consisted of five buildings. In the farmhouse were three rooms and a threshing room (*rehetuba*), where food was prepared and eaten, and where all of the necessary work was done in the winter: repairing harnesses, sledges, and wagons; making and repairing fish traps and nets; repairing footwear; even carving windmill sails. Mother carded and spun wool; then the loom was brought in. Back in those days cloth for towels and sheets was woven from flax; suits were made from home-spun woolen fabric, and half-woolen cloth was used for working clothes. The loom was taken out by St. George's Day,⁸ for then outdoor work

⁸ 23 April, traditional date on the folk calendar for the end of winter work and the beginning of outdoor work; contracts were negotiated with farmhands and servants on this day as well.

began and the weaving of cloth had to be completed. The threshing room was a warm, cozy place, where children studied by the light of a petroleum lamp, and listened to their fathers' and mothers' tales about their parents, their childhood and youth. Father's stories about the sea and the places where life had taken him were interesting. Mother told about her years as a summer farmhand. Dusky evenings around a warm stove come to mind when we would sing, both with mother and without her. My mother often played the *kannel*.⁹ For Christmas, the stove, warming-wall and doors of the threshing room were whitewashed, and the log walls were stripped. Two of the rooms were used as bedrooms, the children sleeping in one, my mother and father in the other. In each room there were wooden bedsteads with chaff-sacks for mattresses, wardrobes, and a table under the window. The third room was much larger, and very tidy; guests were received there. There were striped rag rugs on the floor, a chest of drawers bought at the manor auction, a small table with turned, carved legs, a floor-to-ceiling mirror, a polished birchwood wardrobe made by the village cabinetmaker, and a table. The drawers of that table were always kept locked; Father kept farm and bank documents there. Around the table were six lightweight Viennese chairs, also obtained from some auction somewhere. In the room and the vestibule were many houseplants, since Mother loved flowers. On the wall in the "big room" there was a wall-clock with roses and a pendulum, which struck loudly at each passing hour.¹⁰

The house and the veranda were painted yellow on the outside, with white window frames. The walls of the veranda and the front windows were made of glass, and the two-sided doors were decorated. The yard was divided in two by the garden; the "clean yard" was on one side, and the yard for the farm animals on the other. On the clean side were the pantries for grain, clothing and meat and fish. Between the clothing and fish pantries was a large shed where Father kept his fishing gear, all under one roof. The sauna-granary, the newest building on the farm, was also on the clean side, as well as the orchard, where there were apple trees, plum trees, and berry bushes. On the animals' side were the wagon shed, the smaller stable, the smithy, and the summer kitchen (*paargu*). On the other side of the gate was a post-windmill,

⁹ Traditional stringed folk instrument similar to a zither.

¹⁰ Compare the furnishings of this room to Hilja Lill's description of the house she lived in with her husband.

where flour was ground for the animals; in wartime, for people as well. Father had definite plans in place for building a new farmhouse, stable and hay barn. Lumber was gathered for years. But that was a house he never built, because life changed completely when the Russians came.

My home instilled a love and conscientious attitude toward work in me. At seven I was taught how to drive cattle; at eight or nine my sister and I knew how to milk, though it was hard in the beginning and our hands got tired. At the age of ten or eleven during haying season we stayed behind at home to tend the animals. The hay meadow was on the other side of the bay, a few kilometers away. People went out to the meadow on a Sunday evening, and returned the next Saturday evening to replenish their stores of food and fresh water. During the week an old man from the village looked after us, so that the hearthfire would not go out, and that the livestock were fed and safe. In order to keep us from sleeping too late in the morning, the old man would spend the night at our farm. At thirteen I was taken along to mow hay. When the young people from the farms were counted for the first time as full-fledged workers, the village youth came along to celebrate, and that meant getting wet. There was much fun and merriment; an accordion had even been brought along to the hay meadow. Though it was wonderful to be left in charge at home, we felt proud to be considered more grown up. I pushed myself hard while working, choosing large tracts of the hay meadow to mow, and lifting heavy loads. It was a good feeling to be praised by the older people. At eight years of age my sister and I went to fetch the horses from the pasture. To get the bridles on we would put a piece of bread on the ground and then quickly slip the bridles over their heads. We were famous for our horseback riding, mounting our horses from the stone fence; that way it looked nobler to ride through the village. Farm children went barefoot all summer. In the fall the dew was very cold and the fog thick in the marshes. When we had to bring the horses home from pasture, our toes were cold, so cold it hurt. We would pee on our toes to warm them. At fourteen and fifteen my sister and I ploughed the stubble-fields with a two-horse plow. One of us would hold the reins, the other the horns of the plowshare.

My schooling¹¹ began when I was 7, in the fall of 1935. The Vaivere elementary school had three classrooms, a teachers' room with a

¹¹ Linda Põldes uses the idiomatic expression "my school journey" here. See Introduction.

stove, and a small room where notebooks, ink, pencils, pens, and erasers were kept, which the principal sold to the students as needed. Two grades were together in each classroom. In the larger classroom school parties were held. On the wall there were portraits of President K. Päts and General J. Laidoner; in one of the classrooms there was a portrait of poet J. Liiv, in the other, a portrait of poet L. Koidula.¹² The pupils brought their own sandwiches along. During the long recess tea was brewed in the teachers' room, and was distributed by the pupils in the upper grades. Every now and then the principal would sell 5-cent buns. Since my home was not far from the schoolhouse, the children of our family would go home for long recess, where Mother had lunch ready. In the mornings the principal would read a short Scripture passage, or ask a pupil to read; we would sing "Õnnista ja hoia, vaimuga meid võia" from the hymnal to organ accompaniment. In the fall of 1938, I became a Home Daughter (*kodutiitar*).¹³ I completed my schooling in spring, 1941, at the age of twelve.

In the summer of 1939 Father turned 45. In the winter months he and Mother sang in the mixed choir of the local educational society, "Side": Father was a tenor, my mother a second soprano. On the morning of his 45th birthday Father awoke to the sound of a choir singing under his window. The outside door had been decorated with garlands of oak leaves, adorned with small blue-black-and-white flags. Father had made beer, and Mother took care of the food. Dancing, conversation, and choral singing lasted well into the night. Father was active in the local community, and was elected to the township council, the school board, the fishing cooperative, the water cooperative, more times than I can remember. We subscribed to the magazines *Agriculture*, *Farm Woman*, the provincial newspaper, and a national newspaper. In those years the first radio appeared in the village; it was bought for the schoolhouse. On Sunday mornings the villagers would gather to listen to the sermon. On Independence Day, 24 February, they listened to the military parade and speeches over the radio.

We children would always look forward to Memorial Sunday, celebrated around the time of St. John's Eve. The horse would be in

¹² President Konstantin Päts and General J. Laidoner; poets Juhan Liiv and Lydia Koidula, see Glossary.

¹³ Home Daughters, girls' organization parallel to the boys' Young Eagles (youth organizations resembling the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides).

ornamented holiday harness, and the horse blankets woven for use on festive occasions would be put on the wagon. After the celebration we would go to a grassy area near the cemetery for a charity sale. White “city” bread, candy, and lemonade would be bought for the children. The Kuressaare “clothing fairs” were memorable; these took place in August. Merchants came from all over Estonia, and also from Riga and other places. Carousels and ferris wheels were put up. County Fair photographs were taken, posed for, astride a horse, sitting on the edge of a half-moon, or in a boat riding on the waves, etc. Those family photographs taken at county fairs were almost the only pictures taken. The drive home from the fair always took place in high spirits—men had had a few drinks, and raced each other on the way home. On the first day of Christmas there would be a holiday party for the children at the schoolhouse. All parents and anyone else who was interested would come. On the evening of the first day of Christmas, after the party at the schoolhouse was over, our extended family would gather at Välja-Mihkli. On the third day of Christmas or on Epiphany, we would gather at my mother’s childhood home. On Mother’s Day, tea would be served for the mothers at the schoolhouse. First there would be speeches, and children would present their mothers with small nosegays of violets, decorated with a Mother’s Day ribbon. Easter and Pentecost were no less important in the holiday calendar.

One summer day in 1939 Father came from town, discouraged and in low spirits, and told us that the Russians would be allowed across the border to build military bases.¹⁴ Soon the Russian Army arrived; I remember their high hats and poor quality uniforms with terror. I could not avoid comparing their uniforms with that of my uncle Ruts, who was serving in the Estonian Air Force. I remember a soldier who saw a bicycle for the first time. It is awful to think of the days of the June deportations.¹⁵ During that time we lived more of the time in the woods than at home; after doing only the bare essentials of the farm work we would disappear into hiding again. Every member of the family had a bundle of clothes and other items, so that in case we were separated, we would each have what we needed. Father had slipped

¹⁴ Russian Base Treaty, 1939. The Soviet Union applied pressure to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to create military bases on their soil. This was the prelude to full occupation, which occurred in June 1940.

¹⁵ Deportations of 14 June 1941.

the address of one of our relatives into a pocket in our clothing, so we could find each other in case we got separated. The new landholders (*uusmaasaajad*) appeared, choosing the best land on the farm; 30 hectares were left to the farm after the redistribution.¹⁶ A man who had once been to sea with Father said to him "Look what you got for all of your savings, see, I can get land now for free!" Another scorned Father saying, "You were once an important man in Vaivere, try and see what you can get away with now, for the sake of the devil!"

Almost everyone was aware of what was happening in our nation; the deportations made this all the clearer. A whole family was taken from our village: four brothers, a sister, their mother; two daughters escaped, one ran into the woods, the other was away working in Kuresaare. The reason given for deporting them was that they owned a flourishing horticultural farm.

The front lines drew nearer; the Germans were coming. The Russians took whatever they could get; orders were given for each farm to give up a cow or calf, and these had to be brought to the farmyard of the rural post office and handed over to the destruction battalion.¹⁷ It was already dusk when the cattle began to move, tied head to foot, herded by the destruction battalion. The next day the Germans arrived at the village. The Russians had ordered radios and bicycles to be confiscated. Father knew where they had been taken, and everyone reclaimed theirs. When we got home, the rooms were full of German soldiers, who had mistaken the farm for a household of departed Russian soldiers. We spent the night before the coming of the Germans in a dugout prepared for the family behind the granary. There was no hope of sleeping. There were explosions all night long; the ground shook; shrapnel whistled by and landed on the sauna roof. We thought we would be buried alive.

We no longer feared deportation to Siberia, but life was still very strange; things were quite different from what we were accustomed to. Where the Russians had had a village delegate (*volinik*), the Germans appointed an alderman (*usaldusmees*). My father was the lucky one they selected. Father quickly went to the doctor complaining of ulcers, and was sent on to hospital, escaping that responsibility. All kinds of requisitions were levied on the farms, one of which was an egg quota.

¹⁶ New landholders, see Glossary.

¹⁷ Destruction battalion, see Glossary.

When the quota was met, one would be given points, and these enabled the purchase of other goods. When pigs were slaughtered, their skins were to be flayed and rounded up. Flourmills, threshing machines, tractors, and cars stood immobile for lack of fuel. Fuel began to be replaced by generators operated by burning birchwood blocks. Wooden clogs came into fashion; women wore dress shoes with straps and jointed soles, made out of wood of course; people learned quickly how to make them. Rumors started to spread that the Germans' successful offensive had been halted, then came news that the Russians were doing better at the front. The people preferred the Germans over the Russians.

Then the Russians were back in Estonia, advancing fast. Word was brought to Father of an opportunity to flee to Sweden; places had been reserved on a ship for our whole family. Father decided that he would not leave his home behind and scatter his family far and wide. Somebody had to stay behind in the homeland. And if something were to happen to him, perhaps his family would be spared. The village was full of retreating German soldiers. Their headquarters was located in the main room of our farmhouse. Early one morning the German headquarters were evacuated. The Russians were quite close now, and we could hear the noise of battle. We decided to get out of the way, and headed for the island hay meadow, where father had a fishing hut where we could prepare food and sleep on bunk beds. We were out of bread. Mother's bread-dough was rising, and Father quickly slaughtered a pig. We left on two horse drawn wagons, and Mother was to finish baking the bread and follow us. The oven had already been heated, and the loaves were molded on the breadboard. Mother went to the pantry to get the bread shovel. At that moment a bomb exploded and a large piece of shrapnel landed at Mother's feet in front of the pantry door. The noise and rumbling of battle got louder and louder. The doors were left open, the loaves of bread waiting to be put in the oven, and the heated oven was left to cool while Mother ran into the village to a dugout. It was not until the morning of the second day, when the battle had subsided, that Mother caught up with the rest of us in the hay meadow.

The front lines passed over, leaving the village untouched. The Germans resisted to the last drop of blood. The soldiers, who had occupied our village, chose my father's horse and wagon to transport their military equipment, ammunition crates, and other goods. He

witnessed the battle of Tehumardi.¹⁸ When he returned, he told us that never in his life had he seen anything more bloody and horrible, to the point where even fear of death was impossible. Life under the new regime began in great uncertainty. On the farm, only the most important work was done. The future looked gloomy. The manor houses and village hall were full of Russian military personnel, with a school for sergeants located in the village hall. The grain-drying shed was turned into a delousing shed: it was heated to a high temperature, and lice-ridden clothing was placed on the metal boards to exterminate lice. Again land was redistributed to “new farmers.” Farms were saddled with quotas of all kinds. Farm sizes were assessed, horses and adults counted, and these inventory figures were used to assign lumber, forest work, and gravel-hauling quotas.

The seven-grade school at Vaivere was opened on 1 October 1945. Many people went back to school, including my brother Richard and I. We completed grade seven on 15 June 1946. In the fall of 1946 I could no longer continue my studies, because Father needed help at home, and I was the eldest of the children. I carted gravel from the gravel pit alone: the gravel had to be shovelled up into a heap and deposited at the side of the main road. I have also hauled firewood for the Kuressaare hospital. I had to get on my way at four o’clock in the morning in order for the load to arrive at the hospital by nightfall. The early risings and the cold tired me out.

At the end of February 1947, I was summoned as a “mobilized person” to the township executive committee in Kuressaare. I feared the word “mobilisation” which to me meant being drafted into the military. I did not dare to go alone; Father came with me. We were received by the district Party organizer (*partorg*).¹⁹ While enrolled in the seventh grade I had helped with the drawing up of “land ownership documents.” The township had no clerk, and I was chosen from among the others for my good penmanship and thought to be an appropriate candidate for that job. I refused at first, saying that I wanted to resume my studies in the autumn. My father was also against it, with the justification that he needed more hands on the farm in order to meet the state quotas. But the *partorg* persisted, promising that our hauling quo-

¹⁸ Battle of Tehumardi, October 1944: one of the bloodiest battles in Saaremaa. See also Glossary.

¹⁹ Party organizer (*partorg*), see Glossary.

tas would be reduced, so we agreed that I would go to work, but only until the fall, when the school year began. In the meantime they promised to search for a replacement. I began working on the first of March, 1947. In the beginning everything proceeded normally. But in the fall they refused to let me go, for they had not even bothered to look for anyone else. The local communists at the district level were not satisfied with the choice to hire me. At Party meetings my father's ostensibly secret anti-Soviet attitudes had been under discussion. Those men had a strong desire to label my father a *kulak*.

At the time, Elmar Põldes was already working as the township deputy chairman, and soon became Chairman of the township executive committee. Growth in Komsomol and Party membership was expected. Since it was hard to find new members, pressure was put on those who hesitated. Thus it was strongly suggested to me that I join the Komsomol, and that Elmar join the Party. As it later became clear, in our hearts both of us were in opposition. Father did not know what advice to give; we had to keep our heads above water somehow. At length he agreed, but advised that I be as passive as possible. Elmar Põldes was accepted as a candidate member of the Party. He was a handsome boy, and unfortunately I caught his eye.²⁰ We were young people after all. We went to the movies together, took walks in the park and on the beach, took in all the theatre productions, and ate together in the cafeteria. I learned that he was afraid that his participation in the German *Hilfsdienst* would come out, as well as his sister's flight to the West.²¹ Consequently, Elmar spent very little time as a Party member. There was no shortage of people to inform on him. It was alleged that Põldes was courting the daughter of a *kulak*. Through him I also learned that a certain Kaljulaid and a certain Tõll were not going to give up on their plans to have my father listed as a *kulak* and an enemy of the people. The Saaremaa Executive Committee Chairman, Vassili Riis, summoned Elmar in his capacity as chairman of the township executive committee to give account of why there were so few *kulaks* and

²⁰ As can be seen from the end of Linda Põldes' story, her husband-to-be was to have a tragic fate. The seemingly ironic comment "unfortunately" is made in hindsight, and reflects the bittersweet aspect of her marriage to Elmar—while in the immediate postwar years, his "politically correct" position may have protected her and her family from repressions, the end of the story was sad indeed.

²¹ *Reichsarbeitsdienst* and *Hilfsdienst*, see Glossary.

enemies of the people in the Kuressaare township compared with other areas. Thus Elmar was expelled from the Party. I was accepted into the Komsomol at the end of February 1949, or on the first days of March. I remember how ashamed I was about my membership, how I did not dare talk to anyone about it, it hurt my heart so. I had grown up at home and belonged to the organization *Kodutütred* (Home Daughters), where lofty ideas and deeds were first priority, where there was no hatred, revenge, or betrayal.

How well I remember the 24 March, 1949,²² a work day in the Township Council. In the afternoon, Comrade Karotamm²³ was to arrive to meet personally with the township active Party membership. Throughout the day we cleaned up, and made banners, a book table was brought in from the bookshop, later a snack bar with fresh buns and other things. During the afternoon schoolteachers, librarians and library directors, village soviet chairmen and secretaries arrived, or rather, were summoned. Waiting, followed by more waiting. Karotamm had still not arrived, but the district *partorg* came to reassure and calm us that he was on his way. No one was allowed to leave; we sang to pass the time, but the mood grew increasingly tense. I believe that everyone was sure that something was wrong, and that Karotamm was not going to show up. And then it began. At 12 midnight the doors were closed, and all of the telephones besides the *partorg*'s were disconnected. People became more and more nervous. Clearly something horrible was happening; maybe some of the older people had a sense of what was coming, but we younger ones were clueless. We heard the roar of car engines outside, and armed men in uniform entered. Whether they were ordinary soldiers, KGB men, or the border patrol, I do not know. People were ordered into the large hall and I cannot remember who read the directive of the Council of Ministers on the basis of which all bourgeois nationalists, *kulaks* (bloodsuckers), and other elements hostile to the Soviet regime were to be deported. We had been assembled to help with the execution of the directive. They began forming groups that would accompany the soldiers to "carry out the will of the Estonian people."

Suddenly, as if bitten by a snake, I jumped up in front of the others and announced that I refused to go. I had not had time to think about what was going to start happening in that hall; I only had the feeling that

²² Deportations, see Glossary.

²³ Nikolai Karotamm, see Glossary.

something was not right, and that something horribly violent was about to take place. A uniformed soldier came to me (probably from the KGB), and took me out of the hall into the messenger's room and kept watch at the door. As I left the hall I heard the very young district *komsorg* step forward, saying, "I am going, I will go and avenge my father, who was murdered by the Germans." In retrospect I thought to myself that his father had to have been killed or ordered to be killed by someone else, because he was not even from our area. He, however, was about to go and send innocent people off to Siberia, waking them up in the middle of the night out of a deep sleep. As for myself, I was sure I was on my way to Siberia. Strangely enough, I felt no fear. Then the door opened again, and I had company; Linda Kokk, the former district secretary, who was now working as office director of the provincial executive committee was shoved into the room. She, too, had refused to take part in the deportation. We were locked up for the whole night of 25 March and the next day, 26 March. We were escorted to the toilet by a uniformed soldier, who then took us back to the room and stayed behind the door brandishing his weapon. On the evening of 26 March we were set free, but the *partorg* said that Linda Martinson would stay in the village council house overnight to keep watch, since she had no business at home anyway. Jüri of Välja-Mihkli farm had been taken the previous night.

When I started on my way home on 27 March, Elmar Põldes looked me up. From him I heard how many friends and acquaintances had been deported. The town was practically empty of people. I remember that we walked along the side streets, that it was a lovely spring day, that the sidewalks were free of snow, and water was bubbling in the gutters. He was happy that I was still there, and had spent that entire night with the others worrying about me and my parents. We had no idea how things were at home, no idea how the village had survived that awful night. I started on my way home with a very heavy heart. About 400 meters from home, from the little Kinaksi hill, my home and its doorway were visible. There was smoke in the chimney and a woman with a white kerchief was going in and out of the house. Father and Mother were still there! The *partorg* had lied to me. I sank to my knees, clasped my hands, thanked God, and cried. Only one family had been taken from our village: an elderly mother, her two daughters, and a son. The son had belonged to the Home Guard.²⁴

²⁴ Home Guard, see Glossary.

After the deportation there was a meeting of the township Komsomol to discuss my personal situation, since I had behaved on the day of the deportation in a manner not befitting a young communist. Two proposals were put forward: expulsion from the Komsomol or a stern written reprimand on my record card. I had hoped for the first alternative, but was “punished” by being given the second. I had been admitted to the Komsomol at the beginning of the month; at the end of that same month they considered dismissing me; it was March, 1949. In July of the same year I was ordered to go to Tallinn to take part in courses meant for instructors in cultural education. When I returned to work, I was called in to the Saaremaa Party Committee Office, along with all of those from Saaremaa who had taken part in the training course. Subsequent to the decision of the provincial executive committee, I was dismissed from my job as politically inappropriate. The next summons was to the Komsomol office for dismissal, but I did not make my appearance for that one. Soon the organizational meetings for *kolkhozes* began. Since I took minutes for meetings in the township, I also had to take minutes of *kolkhoz* organizational meetings. The people had been frightened into submission, and the majority submitted their applications on the spot, but there were those that they had to work on. My father was very opposed to entering a *kolkhoz*, since his heart belonged to his land and his home, and it was very difficult to give it all away. The farm had taken his parents’ lives and the best years of his own life. When I came home for a visit we discussed the situation. It seemed to Father that there was no escaping the *kolkhoz*. He submitted his application and the people of the village elected him to the office of deputy chairman, in consideration of his success as a farmer.

After my dismissal from the township I desperately sought a new job, but no one needed me, even for a custodial job. “Dismissed from work on grounds of political inappropriateness” was a powerful label. Then an acquaintance told me that Industrial School No. 11 needed a secretary-clerical worker. I gathered up my courage and went to talk with the director. The director was an Estonian from Russia,²⁵ an older man named Aleksei Villa who had fought in the Estonian Corps. The notation of dismissal from my previous job did not seem to matter to him, and he hired me without asking too many questions. Twice they came from Party headquarters to check up on me. The director gave

²⁵ For “Estonians from Russia,” see Glossary.

me a good evaluation, and when they left they told me to keep working; they would not bother me any more. In connection with the Soviet Union Council of Ministers and the Party Central Committee's 18th of April directive, "Concerning the Progress and Implementation of Collective Cattle Husbandry in Kolkhozes and Sovkhozes" a general meeting was called in my home *kolkhoz*. There were some who sought an opportunity to shine at the price of destroying others. The meeting had been set up in advance: my father had been sent on a business trip (*komandirovka*), and the right people had been found to say the right things. Discussion began around the topic of why the *kolkhoz* had not progressed at a faster rate. According to a few functionaries brought in from outside, the deputy chairman of the *kolkhoz*, Jüri Martinson, was a reactionary influence. The floor was given to the prepared speakers, including some former friends.²⁶ The situation was unfortunate for us; since my father was absent from the meeting people were less embarrassed to raise their hands. A majority voted to classify my father as a *kulak*—the village bloodsucker. My mother, who had been milker and cattle handler (*lüksja-karjatalitaja*) was also dismissed from her job as an untrustworthy individual, who could potentially poison the herd, slow down development, etc. In the newspaper *Island Voice* an article was published with a title in boldface, "The Undermining Actions of a Kulak Exposed." The "underminer" was my father. He was levied a *kulak* tax of 9,000 roubles, which my father borrowed from among his relatives and paid. Then the next tax was levied for 49,000 roubles. That was impossible to pay. All of his property—land, animals, all buildings except for the farmhouse, his agricultural inventory, fishing gear, beehives (14), were collectivized. One cow was left. We knew that they were coming to write up whatever was left. Father quickly sold the cow. Many items, including the meat barrel, tanned animal skins, the sewing machine, and a bicycle were hidden at a neighbor's farm. Except for the meat, which was brought back to our house immediately after the write-up, we never saw the other things again. If I remember correctly, the committee that wrote up the inventory of our property was composed of the *kolkhoz* accountant and the village delegate (nicknamed Kõrtsi Alviine, or Tavern Alviine), who had also been the main agitator to classify my father as a *kulak*. Everything else was written

²⁶ Eighth Estonian Rifle Corps: unit of the Soviet Army during the Second World War, composed of mobilized Estonians; see Glossary.

up: from furniture to smithy tools. The consumers cooperative trucks hauled off our listed goods for two weeks. The dining table and three wooden bedsteads were left in the room. Even the wall clock with the roses was taken. Winter lay ahead of us. The people of the village kept their distance; everyone shunned us, as if we were lepers. They thought they would be considered *kulak*'s accomplices if they continued to talk to us. Once I was on my way from Kuressaare when a sledge passed me, pulled by one of our own horses; the passengers were the farmers' wives of the Soera and Läti farms. They invited me to climb up on the sled, and it was embarrassing to refuse. But soon another sled approached from the opposite direction. Long before they passed I was told to get down, so that no one would see them giving a ride to the child of a *kulak*. We survived many humiliations, and sometimes we got the feeling that we had indeed done something horrendous.

Then we decided to leave Saaremaa for the mainland. A man from our village was working near Kilingi-Nõmme as director of the cattle supply office, and he promised to help us out. At the identity papers' office a woman who was an acquaintance of ours suggested that we list Kohtla-Järve as our destination.²⁷ As it later turned out, this was the right suggestion. I left Saaremaa with my parents. Closing the door to our farmhouse was one of the saddest moments of all. We started our journey from Kuressaare during the night in a postal truck belonging to the Department of the Interior. The weather was unusually cold; we rode in the back of an open truck; our toes were freezing, our hearts sore. It was the last crossing over the ice from Kuivastu to Virtsu. The ice was thin, throbbing like a piece of stretched skin. We were not allowed to sit on the sled, and walked instead; it was recommended that we not walk in a cluster. I keenly felt the fear of death.

We reached the railway station at Kilingi-Nõmme on the morning of 8 March, and phoned the cattle supply station that we had arrived. A horse-drawn sledge was sent to meet us. We got work right away; my father as agricultural brigadier, I as a herder. It was the year 1952. In the chain of command, cattle supply for Kilingi-Nõmme answered to the office at Pärnu, where the director was Ukrainian. We told him who we were. That wonderful man said that based on what had happened in Ukraine he could well understand our situation, and issued us new work record books. It seemed that the worst was over for the time being. In November, 1952, the cattle supply office was loading

²⁷ Kohtla-Järve is located in the industrial area of northeast Estonia.

animals into railway cars to be sent to the slaughterhouse. The order for the railway cars was filled late, and the work continued into the late hours. My father was loading the cars with the workers, and I was helping write up the papers. When the work was done the loading workers started on their way home on two sleds. At the Allikukivi store militiamen were waiting and stopped the sleds. Father was removed from the second one. When I returned home the telephone rang. They asked for me. I froze in fright when I was told that Captain Sadam from the *militis*²⁸ department was on the other end of the line. He informed me of my father's arrest, and asked me to bring him food and cigarettes. I was shaking all over when it was time to go. I have never before or since seen my father looking so helpless, small, and gray. From Kilingi-Nõmme they took my father to Kuressaare, where the trial was held, and then he was transferred to the Patarei Prison in Tallinn.²⁹ His offense was the unpaid kulak tax of 49,000 roubles. They had been searching for us for many months, at first at Kohtla-Järve, and finally found us at Kilingi-Nõmme. After Stalin's death they released him.

Let me go back to the year 1950. After Elmar Põldes' departure from the township executive, our friendship continued. We decided to get married. On the day we were to submit our application in the Family Registry Office, Elmar did not show up. I thought that perhaps he had had second thoughts and changed his mind. With mixed emotions I went back to work. Then the telephone rang, and they were calling from the *militis* precinct at Elmar's request. He had been arrested, and I was asked to bring him food, a towel, and soap. That was about the last thing I could have expected! I did not attend the trial; it was too much for me. Elmar was sentenced to 5 years' imprisonment for breach of financial discipline; neither had they forgotten the German military *Hilfsdienst*, his sister abroad, and his close connections with anti-Soviet elements. His place of imprisonment was the apatite mines in Murmansk. He left his health behind there as well. Elmar was set free after Stalin's death.³⁰ I was living then with my parents at Kilingi-Nõmme. Elmar searched for me and found me there; his appearance had changed a great deal—he was thin and exhausted. We had kept up a correspondence throughout his imprisonment, but when

²⁸ Soviet police.

²⁹ Patarei prison, see Glossary.

³⁰ Stalin's death was in March 1953.

we met there was something strange between us. Our feelings for one another had subsided, but for him I was all he had, his whole life. I had promised to wait for him and I had, indeed, waited. I had not entered into other relationships. After a few meetings I got used to him, and my heart did not belong to anyone else, and therefore I accepted his second marriage proposal. Our marriage was registered on 13 October, 1953. Upon his release it was not recommended (or forbidden, I cannot remember which) that he settle in Saaremaa, so we established our home near Suure-Jaani, on the mainland.

My mother and father were living near Kilingi-Nõmme. My brothers were released from Soviet military service, which had lasted four years. My sister was living and working in Saaremaa. It was easier for her, since her last name was changed upon marriage. My sister wrote to my father that Välja-Mihkli was being put up for sale as property without an owner. The person Father had found to take care of the house for us was to have paid the house tax in exchange for the privilege of living there. Those taxes had not been paid. The same person wanted to buy Välja-Mihkli. Father traveled to Saaremaa. Comrade Pitk—I no longer remember what his job was, probably chairman of the Mereranna *kolkhoz*—suggested that my father consult a lawyer. Of course, Father had no faith in Soviet lawyers, but to his great surprise he got good and profitable advice. An application drawn up by the lawyer was submitted to the *kolkhoz*, asking that my father's listing as a *kulak* be reconsidered. The general meeting of the *kolkhoz* reversed the edict of *kulak*, followed by a similar verdict from the regional executive committee and finally by a decision of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. All of his rights as a "Soviet citizen" were reinstated. The person who had testified against my father when he had been declared a *kulak* was revealed: it was his friend, schoolmate and confirmation classmate, the master of Olli farm, who had more than ten children. Father had helped him generously, giving him grain and fresh fish, doing milling for him, etc. This was the same man to whom my father had lent a suit, who had a bigger farm than we had, but who was not seriously interested in developing his farm, but instead went to Kuresaare on drinking sprees.

After his acquittal Father moved back home to Välja-Mihkli. The house was dilapidated, the roofs in disrepair, the stable at one end of the house had fallen in; they had kept the *kolkhoz* herd there. In the threshing room—our former living room-kitchen, the "housekeeper"

had kept his pigs. It was no longer possible to build a new house, since all the lumber had been taken away. Father did what he could. My parents were content: after all, a home is a home. They did seasonal work as much as possible in the *kolkhoz*, which brought in a few kopecks of money for bread. For the dispossessed property, an entire house worth of lumber, the gathering of which had required years, the expenses of building, hauling, and sawing it, Father was compensated with a very modest sum.

Elmar and I found ourselves a room in Katkoidu farm in the village of Nuutri, with an old widower, a pleasant and companionable old man. Elmar worked in Suure-Jaani, and I stayed at home until the month of December. Elmar began to have fevers peaking in the evening, night sweats, and tremendous fatigue. One day they diagnosed him in the Viljandi tuberculosis clinic with active TB. We were very unhappy. He no longer shared a bed with me. One night I awoke to find him bending over my bed. I woke up and asked, "What are you staring at?" He said, "I was thinking about you; I know what will happen to me, but what will become of you I don't know." I was expecting a baby at that time. He started to go back and forth between the hospital and the sanatorium, spending little time at home. Through the International Red Cross his sister from Hamburg sent medicines that corresponded to his diagnosis and case history, but these medicines did not help either.

I was able to get work in December, 1953 as a clerk in the Suure-Jaani forest reserve. The pay was low. Elmar needed better food. Our son was born on 7 October, 1954. When our son came home from hospital, the doctors insisted that Elmar to go to hospital in order not to endanger the newborn child. He was very fond of children and followed doctors' orders closely; when he was around children he wore a many-layered moist gauze face mask, and washed his own dishes in chloramine solution.

A daughter was born to us on 22 December 1955. That was also Elmar's birthday. Elmar chose our children's names; I did not interfere in those decisions, since he had to give up so many other things. Once Elmar said to me, "I have decided to leave you; it will be less dangerous for you and it will be easier for you." A tear rolled down his cheek. I comforted him as much as I could. To this day I have no idea how or where he was intending to disappear. In April 1955 he went to see the pastor and went through confirmation classes, changing his confession

from Russian Orthodox to Lutheran. One afternoon we had a church wedding at Suure-Jaani. The end came on the morning of 26 August 1958. Our son was three and a half and our daughter two and a half years old. My father and mother wanted to help and take the children in to live with them. I refused, saying that then they would no longer be my children. I resolved to raise my children without a stepfather. In order to manage I got myself a 0.25 hectare garden plot to till, which gave me all I needed in the way of food. I raised pigs and chickens. Somehow I was able to make it, borrowing occasionally.

Beginning in the spring of 1959, I worked in the forest reserve as an accountant, and from May 1973 as warehouse supervisor. My heart ached, since I did not know how to measure and calculate wood products. Everything worked out and I learned how to do the job. Compared with the previous institutions where I had worked, life in the forest reserve was more peaceful. The children grew, finished high school, and decided to continue their studies at Tartu University. My heart was at peace; I thought, "If you get over the dog, you can get over the dog's tail, too." And so we did, my children and I. We spent our summer vacations in Saaremaa with my father and mother. My brothers and their families always vacationed there at the same time. We were all together in our childhood home, and everyone felt good, better than they could anywhere else in the world. Beginning in the fall of 1959 I started singing in the mixed choir Ilmatar. I took part in all of the song festivals from 1960–1980, and sang in choirs for a total of 22 years. Choir rehearsals and performances helped me forget many bad things.³¹

A new era of my life began in 1979. The children had completed their education. I could have embarked on an easier life, spending my money and my time on myself alone. But life had other plans for me. For twenty years I had worked with a man whose name was Aleksander Roosipuu. He also lived alone, raising his two daughters, whom his wife left behind when she left him. He waited for a long time for his wife to return. Aleksander was 44 and I was 51 years old when he discovered me. We went mushroom picking together; he visited me often with his younger daughter, brought me flowers, and found time to chat with me at work. When I went to the 1980 song festival, he watered the plants in my greenhouse. When I came back—he proposed that we start living together. He was a wonderful man, did not drink, was

³¹ Song festivals, see Glossary.

interested in nature and books, and loved good food. I never heard him raise his voice. In contrast to Aleks, I was energetic; the gall that had gathered in my soul for ages had been poured out; I bore no grudges.

We began living together in summer of 1980, and were officially married on 1 September 1984. Like all those who begin a new life, we had big plans. We began to build a new home. For that purpose we were able to get a plot of land in the township of Suure-Jaani, in the village of Epra. We began by building a farmhouse. To earn money we kept animals: 3–4 milking cows, 2–3 calves for the slaughterhouse, a 20-head flock of sheep, 2–3 pigs. At haying time my children came to lend a hand: my son helped with the building work as well. My work in the forest reserve continued: Aleks was technical director, later a technologist; I was master on the conveyor belt. It was important to finish everything quickly, because we needed things to be easier upon retirement. Upon Aleks' urging I retired at the age of fifty-six and a half.

We were able to accomplish much, but there is even more to do, even now. We built a new stable with a hay barn and feedlot for the cattle, a sauna, a shed, and practically a new cellar; we were only able to complete the second floor of the farmhouse and the bathroom; the big downstairs room remained unfinished because—Aleks was no more as of 18 July 1994. An intense heart attack put an end to everything—his life, his dreams and accomplishments. He had just turned 59. Looking back on our years of living together, I must say that life was hard, but the soul was healthy. We were accustomed to having a houseful during the summers. Our grandchildren would come from the city to the country to breathe fresh air, drink warm, fresh cow's milk, and eat food rich in vitamins. There were four children at once replenishing themselves at our farm: two of my grandchildren and two of Aleks's. In the fall when they all left, we felt an emptiness. After Aleks' death a deep silence fell on the yard and on my soul. There was no need to hurry anywhere anymore.

But I do not feel abandoned. My former co-workers, with whom we have maintained contact and friendships, come frequently for visits. My son visits on weekends, and sometimes my daughter and grandchildren as well. If I need any help, they never let me down. On my birthday, on St. John's Eve and at Christmas we are always together.



Tanni Kents

BORN 1920

I was my parents' first child, born in Kuressaare on 22 July 1920. My mother and father met as university students in St. Petersburg in 1918, where they were both studying law. Turbulent times and the Russian Revolution brought each of them by different routes back to Estonia, where they met again at the opening of the Constituent Assembly on 23 April 1919.¹ My father, Timotheus Grünthal was an elected

delegate from Saaremaa and my mother Veera Poska, the daughter of foreign minister Jaan Poska. Their lively correspondence culminated in the decision to get married. Their wedding took place in Haapsalu on 24 September 1919, and the young couple immediately went to Saaremaa, because my father had been elected chairman of the Saare county government. He was 26 years old, my mother 21.

For my mother, who had grown up in Tallinn in a large family of eight children, it was probably difficult to get used to the quiet, mock "German"² and provincial nature of Kuressaare. In the large old manor house that came with my father's job, the dictator was Tiiu, the housekeeper of the former German owners. Mother found something to keep herself busy as a teacher in the Saaremaa Central High School, where she met young Estonian intellectuals, some of whom

¹ Constituent Assembly: interim parliament elected in April 1919, with representatives from 10 political parties, active from 23 April 1919 until the formation of the Parliament of the Estonian Republic on 20 December 1920.

² *Kadakasakshus*—mentality that people of good taste aspired to be like the Baltic Germans, imitating their culture in matters of fashion, interior design, and manners.

were later among my parents' friends. A great blow to my mother was the sudden death of her beloved father in March 1920. My father and mother were unable to attend the funeral in Tallinn, since the sea was full of drifting ice floes in early spring, and connections with the mainland were broken. This prompted the decision to leave Saaremaa for the mainland in order to complete their interrupted university studies. My birth did not change these plans; Father went on ahead to Tartu and re-enrolled in the university; my mother followed with me a few months later. It was hard to find a babysitter, we had no relatives in Tartu. My mother attended lectures in the main building of the university, and it is said that I frequently slept in my pram underneath the windows of the lecture hall.

When I was two years old my little sister was born, who died a few years later of tubercular brain infection. At the time we were living in Tallinn. Immediately upon graduating from university Father got a job as candidate for an official's position in the Tartu-Võru Court of Common Appeals. It took my mother over four more years to complete her university studies, and by then she already had four children.

My memories of our time in Tartu are very limited; most of them come from stories my parents told. We lived in two furnished rooms in the five-room apartment of an impoverished German spinster. The rooms were filled with old moth-eaten furniture. Even now I find it hard to comprehend how my mother was able to continue her university studies in such conditions, and how my father wrote up his legal opinions for the court. According to Father's stories, our meals usually consisted of rutabaga and carrots baked in the oven, along with smoked lamb, which was sent to us from my father's parents' farm in Muhu. Later we had a household helper, a cheerful, hardworking woman from Võrumaa, whom I called Vana Maake. I remember how, on the day a few years later when we moved to Tallinn, we said goodbye to Vana Maake in the Tartu train station. She cried and cried, and I tried to comfort her with our family photograph, telling her that if she looked at it, we would be closer to her.

My father had been appointed judge of the Tallinn-Haapsalu Court of Common Appeals, and our life in Tallinn was quite different from our life in Tartu. We now lived in my late grandfather's house on Poska Street in Kadrioru. I remember that there was a garden that resembled a park, and a large bathroom in the house—marble steps led into the bathtub. My mother's brother Jüri, who was orphaned, now

belonged to our family; his mother had died when he was four years old. Living in the house were my mother's five sisters and her brother Jaan with his wife. Then there were big changes: the death of my sister, my father's illness; Jüri's departure to join his other sister; my mother, sister, and brother going to Nõmme. My father had to go to Finland for treatment, to a TB sanatorium near Kuopio. My mother was fortunate enough to land a job as an attorney in the Tallinn Legal Aid Bureau, as all of my father's judge's salary went towards the cost of the sanatorium in Finland. What I remember from that sad time are Father's letters and postcards to us children. All of the mail we received from Father had been pressed with a hot iron before we saw it—in hopes that all the tuberculosis bacteria would be killed.

We spent summers in Haapsalu, at Grandfather's lovely summer home, which was located directly opposite the Kursal on Poska Avenue. There were many young people and children staying there; my favorites were Villem Grünthal-Ridala's three sons, Esmo, Vilmo and Veljo. Our favorite activities were track and field competitions, organized by my brothers Ivar and Esmo. I was no athletic star, and never got first place in anything; Esmo and Jüri's legs were much longer. Jüri would sometimes go to the castle gardens to play tennis, but the rest of us did not have tennis racquets. Of course a large part of our time was taken up with swimming; the so-called African Beach was only ten minutes away. We also went by motorboat to Paralepa Beach.

My father's health did not improve, and my parents decided to go to Tartu to get a second medical opinion. It turned out that there was tuberculosis in my father's left kidney, and that it would be necessary to remove the afflicted kidney. Dr. Wanach, at that time the director of the second surgical clinic, performed this operation, which in those days was life threatening. The operation was successful and Father's health started to improve. Our family was reunited, and Father went back to work. We continued to live at Nõmme until Father was appointed a state judge. The State Court was located in Tartu, on Veski Street. We moved back to Tartu, where we lived first on Veski Street, then on Hurt Street. Later on we moved into our own house on Hurda 12, which was nationalized by the communists in 1940.

One summer, it must have been in 1933, Grandfather came in his motorboat from Muhu to Haapsalu, and took Father along with the two older children—Ivar and myself—to my father's home on the island of Muhu. The boat was left in Kuivastu harbor, and we rode

by horse and wagon to Luiskama, which was three kilometers inland from Kuivastu. Luiskama was a private farm, two kilometers from the village of Simiste, and about three kilometers from the village of Rässa. Ivar and I slept in the storehouse. There was a rye field under our window. For the first time in our lives we were in the country, at a farm. The farmhouse, built in 1906 had a roof made of reeds, but was otherwise quite modern. There were several rooms besides the main room, where there was a stove and a bread oven, as well as a long, broad dining table. My father's brother Jaan, his wife, and three children lived at the farm together with my grandparents. Of the children, Jaan was a year, Fely three years, and Aadi nine years younger than me.

My grandmother Riste was a small, thin woman, who always wore Muhu folk costume along with the traditional headdress. She was the middle sister of seven, and was married at the age of 16. Even in those days (1933) she still had several skirts and shirts from her hope chest in the storehouse.

Grandfather was tall, and he had a long beard. He was very interested in newspapers, though there was little time for reading. The soil was of poor quality, and thus fishing provided an important supplement to the diet. Grandfather and Jaan went to sea often, caught eel, and sold them to the fish-well-boats.³ Sometimes small eel would be smoked in the yard in a smoke-oven. In the springtime, there was a great yield of smelt and ocean perch. The fish were cleaned, lightly salted and then dried. We usually ate boiled fish with potatoes. First the potatoes would be boiled until they were half-soft, then the dried fish would be put on top. What good, tasty food that was! Grandmother baked her own bread; the bread bowl was very old, brought from Pöide in Saaremaa. The bread was sweet-and-sour rye, made with boiling water. Grandmother put one such sweet oval-shaped loaf of bread in my backpack when we fled from Estonia. They raised a sizeable flock of sheep; from them they got wool, and greatcoats were sewn from the skins. In the winter lamb was a main source of food, alongside fish. Over ten cows were kept at Luiskama; every morning they walked around the herd-path to Ülissaare by the sea, and followed the lead cow home in the evening.

³ Fish-well-boats: larger collection boats with a well in the deck to keep freshly-caught sea fish.

It was during that summer that Grandfather, along with Father and Kolk, the master builder began planning a house for us on the forester's plot next to the Luiskama farmlands. My father had purchased the land from the state. My father had been forest warden there at one time, and he had planted the young pine forest. For the foundation, large flagstones were brought from somewhere in Saaremaa. Now, 70 years later, they are as bright and strong as ever. Father planned to build the house as a place to live in when he was old. There was a front porch with a stone floor, a spacious front room, and a winding staircase leading to the second floor. On the ground floor there was a roomy living room, kitchen, three large bedrooms and a WC. On the upper floor were two more bedrooms, one of which had a balcony with a view of the sea, shining blue in the distance. A few hundred meters on toward Kuivastu was the new Simiste village primary school—a modern six-grade schoolhouse built in the 1930s. Our house had central heating, which, just like in the schoolhouse, was constructed by well traveled Muhu master builder Kolk, who had studied in America. Beginning in 1934 we spent all of our summers on the island of Muhu.

There were many Russian Orthodox believers in Muhu, and our extended family was among them. The Orthodox Church was at Hellamaa, and the graveyard was there, too. Every year 29 June was the church's name day, a great holiday, as well as my father's birthday, and we always went to church with the whole family.

Every other day Ivar and I would go to the Kuivastu post office to pick up the mail. Father subscribed to several newspapers, and for us children there was the magazine *Brain Gymnastics* with crossword puzzles and other brain teasers. My aunt's husband, Eduard Laaman, was the chief editor of *Vaba Maa*, and my father thought his editorials were the best. *Päevaleht* was a large-format newspaper, and the wind would mess it up. *Meie Maa* was the local Saaremaa newspaper: my father had founded it, and he was fond of it, because it always informed him about the island people and their activities. Of course we also subscribed to *Postimees*, that in my father's opinion was a well-edited newspaper, better than that of the Farmers' Party, *Kaja*. To the children, the most interesting newspaper was *Esmaspäev*, a gossip rag of sorts. When we went to the post office we took a large bag with us, to carry all the letters and newspapers. On the way home, we walked straight across the pastures, the *karja-arud*, as they said in Muhu. We found ourselves

a shady tree and started reading the newspapers, folding them carefully after we finished.

Later on, my mother would often be abroad during the summers, attending all sorts of international conferences;⁴ the housekeeper who kept things running at home was Tikka Juula. She would come every morning and leave in the evenings. In her youth Juula had been a cook at the manor house, and knew how to make very tasty things to eat. From her I learned how to bake a chicken, and how to make all sorts of desserts. Grandmother taught me how to bake whole wheat bread; she was worried that a girl who did not know how to knead and bake white bread and whole wheat bread would never find a husband. I never learned how to make rye bread, though, because I thought that there were no kneading troughs in the city, and that there everyone bought their bread at the store.

Ivar and I were exempted from farm work, since Father thought children should swim in the summertime. And so we were at the seaside a great deal, and only helped with the haying and weeding of the vegetable garden. Unlike my younger sister Vera, who was good friends with my cousin Fely, Ivar and I were not interested in farm work; they would go from farm to farm in the neighborhood and take part in working bees.

My Muhu summers brought me closer to the relatives on my father's side. Up till that time I had only known my mother's family. The trip to Muhu and Kuressaare in the spring of 1935 was one of my unforgettable memories. After leaving there as a little baby, I had never been back to Kuressaare.

And so we spent all our summers in Muhu. Meanwhile I had begun attending school. My first school day was 13 April 1931. Since I had been frequently ill as a child, and since my mother had a private schoolteacher's certificate, she had the right to teach me at home. Every spring I arranged my examinations at the Tartu Primary School No.1 on Botaanika Street. In the spring of 1931 I was placed in the fourth grade, and in the fall entered the fifth. I graduated from the six-grade Estonian Education Association Girls' Gymnasium (ENKSTG) in June 1933, and from the high school by the same name in spring

⁴ Veera Poska-Grünthal (1898–1986) was active in several international organizations for peace and women's rights, and attended several Congresses of the Women's International Peace and Freedom League.

1938. In high school I chose the humanities branch, where we learned Latin, in addition to German and English. Most of our schoolteachers were women. The principal was Hans Karu, who had graduated from Tartu University in ancient languages. Hans Karu had taken part in the War of Independence as a schoolboy and was very patriotic minded, as well as a strict disciplinarian. Hans Karu's wife Marta Karu, who taught history, was the sister of well-known writer Hugo Raudsepp. She was a very witty woman with a fine sense of humor, a member of the Estonian Women University Students' Association. My primary school Estonian teacher, Amanda Kõsta had a strong influence on me, opening my eyes to Estonian poetry. Martha Niggol, who taught German, had many original ideas about how to arouse our interest in foreign languages.

I have always been very interested in books. I do not remember that I had any particular schoolbooks at home, though there was a great deal of Estonian literature and belles lettres and translations from world literature. I was quite young when I read August Jakobson's novel *Vaeste patuste alev* (The Town of the Poor Sinners), which had received an award in the literary competition sponsored by the publishing house "Loodus." I did not understand very much of this book, but what remained with me was a poor woman's saying that women needed to be like racehorses at the hippodrome, slender and fast.

In our home there was a library instead of a parlor, with Father's writing desk under the window, floor to ceiling bookshelves on two walls, and a large fireplace between them. The only furniture besides Father's writing desk and chair was two high-backed leather armchairs. Here I would often sit, my feet pulled up under me, reading. Every child had a desk; mine was white, with curved rococo legs and drawers on both sides. My sleeping couch divided my sister's and my room in half, and behind it a white curtain hung down from the ceiling. During the day I put my bedclothes in the white wardrobe. We both had a window overlooking the garden. There were pink rugs on the floor that came from our grandparents' one-time Kadrioru home.

The most popular room for the whole family was the dining room, where the piano stood, and, above that, Grandmother's portrait. From the dining room a door opened onto the veranda. In the dining room there was a white-tiled stove, the back side of which warmed my sister's and my room. Instead of a sideboard there were built-in shelves, protected by glass doors, and cabinets below, where the coffee- and lunch dishes inherited from Grandmother were kept, the tableware and

tablecloths in the drawers below. On one shelf was a radio. Next to the cabinet was a wide door with glass panels from floor to ceiling, which took up most of the space of that wall, but which gave light to the front room. My mother was very interested in modern interior architecture, and so, following a Scandinavian model, there were many wardrobe cabinets. There were many cabinets and storage spaces in the kitchen as well; we did not have a refrigerator, and things were kept cold in the pantry. In the basement was a laundry room with a laundry-boiling kettle and one room partially filled with sand, where carrots and rutabagas were kept all winter; on the shelves were bags of potatoes, and barrels of pickles and sauerkraut.

From the kitchen a door led to the glassed-in veranda, and a small front room, from there one entered the bathroom, the servants' room, the dining room, the large vestibule, and the WC. I remember that in the winter clothes were dried in the attic, where there was also a clothing press for sheets and towels.

My brothers' rooms also had windows facing the garden. I particularly remember one large window where Ivar would secretly let me in when I was sometimes late getting home from school parties. Throughout my high school years I always had to be home at eleven at the latest, but the parties always ended at eleven. Every night at eleven my father would lock the front door on the first floor, since I did not have a key. I had to ring the doorbell and get scolded by my father. When I entered university, father gave me my personal key to the front door.

We young people were raised during the Estonian Republic. This was our epoch, a time that belonged to us. Everything that came before, which we studied from the history books was the distant past, and it hardly touched me. When the whole family was gathered around the dinner table, Father and Mother would discuss interesting court cases from their legal practices; we children talked about our everyday problems. There was no time for history, because the present was what counted.

Since my mother worked as an attorney outside the home, we had a young woman at home who taught us children German. The one who lasted the longest was Marie Kaup, who went to Germany in 1939 with the *Umsiedlung*.⁵ I think she was a Germanized Estonian (*kadakaslane*) who had attended a German girls' school. The household

⁵ The *Umsiedlung* (resettlement) was Adolf Hitler's call to Baltic-Germans to repatriate to Germany, beginning in fall 1939. See Glossary.

help was always a Russian-speaking woman. This way I learned how to speak both German and Russian as a child, but unfortunately not to read or write these languages.

In high school the students of our era participated enthusiastically in extracurricular activities. There were intramural volleyball competitions, and there were two girls' teams which represented our school in competitions between schools. I was not a good volleyball player, but I was more interested in the track and field competitions held in the spring. We also had a student government, headed by an "elder," an elected leader of the student body, and a board of directors. There were clubs as well, and for a few years I directed the drama circle. I also participated in the literary club. An interesting feature of these was the so-called "literary trial," where the defendant was a character from a well-known novel; there was a prosecution, defense, and witnesses, and the proceedings were presided over by a judge. In the last literary trial I took part in during spring 1938, the defendant was an Estonian young person of the time, who after lengthy accusations and a passionate speech of the defense, was declared innocent in view of extenuating circumstances, especially the surrounding lack of interest toward young people. Now, 60 years later, I feel that the Estonian young person at that time had a great deal of independent mindedness and self-confidence, which gave him courage and moral support during the difficult times that lay ahead.

Already in my early years of high school I had chosen law as my future profession. Doubtless my home environment had a significant influence: my father, Timotheus Grünthal, was a state judge, and my mother one of Estonia's first female attorneys. Her father, Jaan Poska, had been a lawyer, as well as three of her sisters and two of her brothers. The youngest, Jüri, lived with us while attending university in Tartu, and graduated from the law faculty in exile in Stockholm. My mother's other brother, Jaan, participated in the War of Independence as a schoolboy. He was imprisoned during the first Russian occupation and died in prison.

In 1938 there was such a large number of applicants to most of the departments of Tartu University that competitive entrance examinations were organized. It was particularly difficult to get into the faculty of medicine, but for the law faculty as well there were twice as many applicants as the 150 who were admitted. One of the examinations was oral, the other written, with a choice of several topics. I chose the

political situation in Europe in 1938. I was fortunate to be admitted, though I was in the middle rather than at the top of the list.

After being admitted to university, I also chose to become a member of a sorority, and upon the recommendation of my parents I chose the Estonian Women University Students Association.

I was married during the German occupation on 24 January 1942 in Tartu. A few days before my wedding I passed my last examination in the faculty of law, and presented my diploma thesis in early spring 1942, entitled “The Development of Fixed-Rate Mortgage in the Baltic Legal Codex.” I received my university graduation papers one day before my 22nd birthday in July 1942. I had studied in the Tartu University law faculty for seven semesters, and ex-matriculated for one semester, from fall 1940 to January 1941 because of my father’s profession during the Estonian Republic—he was the head of the civil law department of the Supreme Court of the Estonian Republic. My tuition rate had been raised so high that I could not afford to pay it. I got a job at the Tartu Girls’ Dormitory as a lower level official, saved money, and was able to continue my studies in January 1941. I began my studies in the Tartu University Faculty of Law during the Estonian Republic, and according to the curriculum of that time. In 1940 the Russian Communist occupation destroyed the legal structure of the Estonian Republic and replaced the laws with communist ones. Marxism-Leninism and Communist Party history became required subjects, which were prerequisites for everything else. There was a great difference between the professors of the Republic and the occupation eras; the previous scholarly standards were replaced by conformity to false teachings built on communist ideology. When the war broke out, the German occupation came to Estonia, and once again we had to get to know a new legal system. The knowledge foundation of my first four semesters of study proved to be most valuable.

When I got married, we got our first very own apartment together—a small room with the use of the kitchen in the apartment of a Tartu high police official, who had been deported to Siberia. My husband, Kaljo Pill, had graduated from the forestry department of the Faculty of Agriculture, and was writing his diploma thesis while working at the Tartu Heating Bureau. I did not have a job at first, and in the first spring of my marriage was preoccupied with my diploma thesis; later, when we were able to move into a larger room in a modern building on Puistee Street, my main task was furnishing our modest home and

procuring daily food by running from one store to another. Our first child, Jüri, was born on 27 August 1943. Opposite our apartment on Puistee Street was a military airfield, and the air raids were very frequent, since the war was moving steadily closer to us.

My sister Vera, who was five years younger than I, was in her last year at the Estonian Youth Association Girls' Gymnasium (ENKSTG). The school office was evacuated to Tallinn, and the graduating students had to go there to claim their final report cards. Since my mother had been in St. Petersburg during the revolution in 1918, and experienced the hardships and turbulent circumstances there, she felt that little Jüri should be taken from Tartu to the country. And so Kaljo took me and seven-month old Jüri to his relatives in Vara parish, not far from Tartu; my younger sister and younger brother went to the island of Muhu to my grandparents. My brother who was four years younger had already fled to Finland that fall, and was in the Finnish army. My husband, father, and mother stayed on in their jobs in Tartu. Thus a few restless months passed, the front came closer and closer, and my family decided that if one did not want to fall into the hands of the Russian army, it would be necessary to flee Estonia. At the time clandestine boat traffic was liveliest in Hiiumaa. We received reports that in the next few days a motor-sailboat named *Lootus* (Hope) would be leaving for Sweden. Jüri, Vera, and Tommi and I were in Haapsalu together, where Mother had rented a small apartment. I do not remember how Jüri and I got to Hiiumaa and onto the *Lootus*, but Vera and Tommi stayed on in Haapsalu. Besides a few crew members, the passengers on the *Lootus* were exclusively women and children. We had to wait for several days for a favorable wind, and then diphtheria broke out among the children. In the meantime Kaljo had gotten from Tartu to Haapsalu, and followed us to Hiiumaa. He took us off the boat. We wandered back again across the island of Hiiumaa and back to Haapsalu, Jüri in his little carriage, with a suitcase laid across the carriage containing our only treasure, documents and photos. Jüri's diapers and Grandmother's big loaf of rye bread were in a backpack. On some kind of boat we got back across the bay to Haapsalu. Mother had information that along with the Estonian Swedes (*rannarootslased*) anyone who could prove Swedish ancestry would be taken along from Haapsalu to Sweden. My grandmother had been born Constance Ekström; her father, Ivar Ekström, had been born in Estonia and run a master glassworker's workshop in Tallinn in the Old Market Square.

My grandmother's family had been members of the Tallinn Swedish congregation, where they had been confirmed. Thus my mother, along with her younger sister and brother had the right to travel to Sweden on a Swedish ship, while this right was not extended to my father, myself, to Kaljo, or to little Jüri. And so we lived in Haapsalu in late summer, waiting for the chance to travel to Sweden. A new problem emerged, since the Germans forbade all men from leaving the country. Neither my father nor Kaljo was considered mobilizable, my father because of his age, and Kaljo because of heart problems. By coincidence, my father and Kaljo were able to get passage on a motorized sailboat belonging to some people from Muhu; the ship left the beach near Tallinn, and had a favorable passage across the stormy sea to Sweden. My mother, Veera Poska-Grünthal, writes in her memoirs:

Finally the long awaited Swedish "white ship" the Juhan, arrived in Haapsalu. Tanni piled our small number of worldly goods on the baby carriage along with Jüri, and so we made our way to the harbor, with my younger son and daughter in tow. No one knew when the boat would begin loading, and when it would pull out, since there were German patrols everywhere, and everything depended on them. We did not want to leave the harbor, and spent the night in a storage shed close to the beach.

The next morning I had to be parted from the children, since I had to go to Tallinn to reach an agreement with the man from Muhu, Kolk, about how my husband and son-in-law would travel. My heart ached as I left my children, but there was nothing to be done. This was during the last days of August 1944. In Tallinn I arrived at the agreed-upon address in Kadrioru under cover of darkness. We did not need to exchange many words; people from Muhu knew each other. I was instructed as to where and when I had to go to the beach with the men, and had to memorize a password. I passed on the information to Tommi and Kaljo. Everything had to happen as unassumingly as possible. We sat in the streetcar like strangers, and the men could not carry any baggage. Since I was not going along, I carried Timm's briefcase and Kaljo's backpack.

The journey to the harbor in the darkness went without a hitch. Finally we arrived at the agreed-upon spot on the beach. How long would we have to wait? Would the boat even come? This was an unnecessary worry. Suddenly the shape of a man emerged from the darkness. Was this him? We waited to hear the agreed-upon password. Kaljo and Timm's responses were acceptable to the man. All three retreated, their figures melting together into a single shadow. I was alone. When and where would I see them again?

The next morning I went back to Haapsalu. There I found only my daughter Vera waiting. The Juhan had weighed anchor early that same morning. I hurried to the harbour. The whole harbour was empty of people, and there were only some bags and suitcases left behind. I glanced over at a baby carriage

standing a little ways away, and recognized it as Jüri's, with a few items of children's clothing inside.

Only later in Sweden did I hear the story of how Tanni was able to get herself and her year-old child onto the boat, without a permit. She had spent the entire day keeping watch in the harbor. Only those with the requisite permit were allowed to board the boat. When night fell, orders were issued that mothers and small children could board the boat to spend the night. Tanni grabbed Jüri and hurried on, leaving the carriage and the baggage in Tommi's car. In the morning she refused to leave, saying, you can throw me and the child overboard, but I will not leave this boat on my own. And finally they left her alone.

And so all of us made it to Sweden, even if it was on four different boats. The last to arrive was my mother along with my sister Vera. *Juhan*, the boat Jüri and I were on, and where my little brother Tommi was a stowaway, also made it safely to Swedish shores. From the harbor we were taken to a delousing sauna, where our clothing was disinfected with heat and then put in a refugee camp in the resort at Tylösand, from where we were later transferred to Mölle camp in southern Sweden. A few weeks later, in Tylösand I got news that Kaljo, too, had escaped, and soon he came to join us. But there were many who drowned on small boats on the stormy Baltic Sea, and who never reached Sweden.

In the camp we busied ourselves studying Swedish, which was a prerequisite for entering the Swedish labor market. My mother and father had gotten so-called archival work at Stockholm University, where several former professors from Tartu University had already found work.

Finally, in the spring of 1945, we got out of refugee camp. Kaljo got archival work at the forestry university near Stockholm, where several forestry specialists among Estonian refugees had already found work. We got one room in my parents' two room apartment, which was located in a suburb of Stockholm on the island of Lidingö. In those days there was a great shortage of apartments in Stockholm; we entered our names on the list of a cooperative apartment building that was being built and paid our share. But we waited so long that seven years later, when our turn came to purchase an apartment, we were already living in our own little house in Montreal.

The Estonians were not the first war refugees in Sweden: the Finns and Norwegians were there ahead of us, but they returned to their homelands at the end of the war. Sweden had succeeded in remaining

neutral throughout the war, so they had no idea of the horrors of war, and they knew very little about communism. The people had an anti-German sentiment, since Norway had been occupied by the Germans. And Estonians were regarded as Nazis, since we had not fled from the Germans, but from the Russians. The Soviet ambassador to Sweden at that time was Mme Kollontai, a remarkably sociable and charming Russian diplomat, who even had connections with the Swedish royal family. Consequently, Sweden became the first European country to recognize the communist occupation of Estonia not only *de facto*, but also *de jure*. Thus Sweden handed the gold of the Republic of Estonia over to the Soviet Union, as well as all privately owned vehicles by which Estonians had fled over the sea to Sweden. In 1946 Baltic soldiers were extradited to the Russians. Sweden lacked the courage to say “no” to the demands of the Soviet Union. This brought along with it the secondary migration of many Estonians, since Sweden seemed to be too insecure a place to build a permanent home.

For that reason Kaljo and I decided to travel on to Canada with our two little boys Jüri and Jaan. We feared that the communist occupation of Estonia would last for a good long time yet. We left Sweden in spring 1951 on the Swedish steamship *Gripsholm*. We arrived in Canada on the 2nd of May, landing in Halifax harbor in the province of Nova Scotia. Our provisional plan was to begin our lives in Toronto, but a four hour layover in Montreal left us with such a good impression—the downtown area reminded us strongly of European cities—that we stayed in Montreal and lived there until 1980.

Kaljo found work almost immediately as a draughtsman in a British firm, later as an accountant. We rented a three-room apartment on a street where there were already several Estonian families ahead of us. There was no apartment shortage in Montreal. We soon received the boxes of books and the two mattresses that had been sent after us from Sweden. From the first paycheck we bought the children the simplest of iron bedsteads, while we ourselves slept on the floor for many years, saving money for the deposit for our own home. Kaljo built a temporary table from our book boxes, where we ate, with orange crates for chairs. From somewhere he was able to obtain bits of boards, and thus both of our sons got desks. Carpentry tools could be borrowed for a small fee from the French janitor of our building.

I had the good fortune of finding a nice elderly Estonian lady whose daughter worked as a typist in a Canadian firm. We gave them

one of our rooms, and in exchange the old lady agreed to look after our children. And so I was able to go to work myself, finding myself a job by answering a want ad in the newspaper. I was worried about my lack of English skills, but for a cataloguer it was sufficient, since I knew the alphabet. We were young, very thrifty, modest, and undemanding. Housing was cheap, and I often made soup for supper. On the 1st of May 1955 we were able to move into our own little house on Lavigne street in the Montreal suburb of Cartierville. The children each had their own room on the second floor, and on the first floor were three rooms and a nice sunny kitchen, from which a few steps led down to the garden.

It was one kilometer to our children's school; there was a school-bus, but that cost money, and so they walked to school. There were not too many students in the six-grade elementary school, and the principal was an older woman, the teachers young. The school was located in a very pleasant quiet place, away from the noise of traffic, its spacious schoolyard surrounded by old trees. On Saturdays we took the children to Estonian scout meetings, which took place, as did all Estonian activities and events, in the social hall of St. John's church. Sometimes we went to church on Sundays. For many years I sang in the Estonian mixed choir, and the rehearsals were in the same St. John's church.

In 1952 my mother founded a women's magazine, *Triinu*, which for over 40 years was a channel of communication between Estonians who had landed on different continents as refugees. Beginning in the 1970s I helped my mother with the editing of *Triinu*, carrying on correspondence and gathering articles from Estonians in Canada, the USA, and Australia. From 1985 to 1995 (when the magazine ceased publication), I was the editor-in-chief of *Triinu*.

Triinu was published four times a year, and included writings about the lives and activities of Estonians outside Estonia, especially the work of preserving Estonian culture abroad. *Triinu* strove to support Estonian traditional handicrafts, publishing the writings of ethnographers about the correct way to make folk costumes, about folk customs, and often also the use of Estonian folk patterns in handicrafts. Connections with Estonian folk traditions helped preserve our identity among all the different influences and impulses we encountered abroad.

Triinu was first intended to be a women's magazine, but over the years it became a family magazine, publishing many scholarly and general education articles, most of them authored by Estonian women

(and men, too) who were recognized in their fields, After my father's unexpected death, my mother lived with us in Montreal temporarily for three years. There she founded the Montreal Estonian Women's Society, which I headed for many years until moving to Toronto.

The children finished elementary school and went on to high school, then to college. Jüri, who had had a great interest in mathematics since childhood, went on to study engineering. Later, as a scholarship student in the USA, he defended his doctoral dissertation on city traffic planning. Jaan chose the philosophy department, and after graduating from the University of Toronto obtained his teaching credentials, specializing in the teaching of handicapped children. While in high school, both Jüri and Jaan were confirmed in the Estonian congregation of the St. John's Church. In those years there were many Estonian young people there, but by now the number of Estonians in Montreal has declined; young people have moved to other cities, and those who have stayed are older people. Both Jüri and Jaan also found jobs in Toronto; in Montreal, located in a French-speaking province, there was a preference for workers with a French Catholic background.

Kaljo and I were left to ourselves, though we always saw the children at Christmas, and in the summers in the country. Many years before, along with several other Estonian families, we had bought land for a summer home on the banks of a lake. Kaljo built a small house and a sauna there. We would often go to the country in the winter. The ground was hilly, so the skiing was good.

The year that Kaljo turned 50, he was diagnosed with a heart defect, which took him to his grave eight years later. The children were both in Toronto, and now I was living alone in our once happy, dear home. On weekdays I went to work, but the weekends were long and empty. Paul Kents, Kaljo's friend from Tartu University and Raimla fraternity days, was working as a geologist in South America for a Canadian company, and was also single due to a divorce. The company headquarters was in Montreal; when business took him to Montreal, he would stay with Estonian friends. We knew each other from Tartu days, but by that time Paul, who was eight years older than me, had already graduated from university and was an assistant in the geology department of Tallinn Technical University. In the fall of 1939 he was sent to study in USA, where he stayed on because of the war.

I married Paul Kents on 12 May 1979. I retired at the age of 60, in 1980. Paul worked until 1982, until age 70. Since Jüri and Jaan were

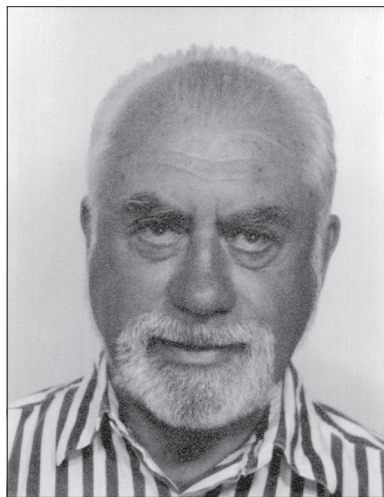
both in Toronto, and Paul's children were living near Toronto, I decided to sell my house in Montreal and move to Toronto. We bought an apartment in the Estonian apartment house "Eesti Kodu," and have been living here since 1982. It is like living in an Estonian village. We have five buildings: one six-story and four three-story, 144 households in all. There are monthly church services in Estonian, and we celebrate Estonian Independence Day, Mother's Day, Christmas, and other holidays together in the social hall. In the six-story building there is an office, a sauna and swimming pool, a women's handicraft room, a men's workshop, gym, billiard room, and a library along with a reading table and a laundry with washers and dryers. Three times a week the Estonian food shops send a truck, so that there is always Estonian food and bread to be had. There are also many clubs.

Paul and I sang for years in the Estonian mixed choir, and now we are members of the Old St. Andrew's church choir. For over 60 years I have been a member of the Estonian Women University Students Association, and still participate actively in the Toronto branch activities.

My sons are both married to Canadians, and I am sad that my grandchildren no longer speak Estonian, though we have a strong sense of belonging in my family, and we spend much time together.

As I look back on my life, I can see that it has been very different from what I dreamed about as a schoolgirl. I had no way of imagining that one day I would have to live my life far away from Estonia. But I have always tried to remain an Estonian.

Tanni Kents died in Toronto in January 2005



Hans Lebert

BORN 1924

I was born on 8 March 1924 in the Tallinn Old City, on Aida Street near St. Olaf's Church. In the old days this part of town was known for its grain warehouses. At the time of my birth, my father was an engine driver on the railroad, but soon afterwards began working in my uncle Eduard Kreek's auto mechanic shop, in the courtyard of the building where we all lived. Since the good old Swedish era,¹ my father's

forebears had been farmers in Riisipere, in Nissi county (*vald*). He probably got his German-sounding name from a German baron, who found it easier to say Leberti Hans than Lepiku Hans. My mother, along with her brother and sister had moved from Russia to Estonia during the Revolution. For some reason, Mother's parents stayed in the Soviet Union. My mother's father was a priest in the Russian Orthodox Church. Later he was said to have worked as a cobbler, perhaps because religion was banned during the Soviet era.

For the first four years of my life I lived in Tallinn. Then all of us moved to Rakvere. Uncle Eedi expanded his repair service, founded a large vulcanizing workshop, and acquired representation at a Soviet Union oil concern. Long trainloads of oil and gasoline came from Russia to Rakvere, and were distributed from there all over the country.

¹ "Good old Swedish time," reference to the time of Swedish rule in the 17th century, a respite between the turbulent times of war and famine during the Russo-Livonian war in the second half of the 16th century, and the submission of the territory of Estonia and Livonia to the rule of the Russian Empire in 1721. The "good old Swedish time" was "good" particularly due to the Swedish kings' progressive policies in the areas of education and the Lutheran church.

Besides that he owned a number of taxicabs in Rakvere. When I was six years old, my brother Heino was born. When we had lived in Rakvere for two years, the worldwide economic crisis hit. Uncle Eedi's businesses went bankrupt, all of his activities stopped, and he found himself deep in debt. Our family moved to Riisipere. Grandfather had a small farm there. Grandfather and Grandmother were getting old, and they wished for my father, the eldest son, to take over the farm.

I got my basic education at the Nissi elementary school. I had learned to read and write before starting school, and I was put in the second grade. In spring 1936 I completed the Nissi elementary school, and the question arose of what would become of me. The school director said to my parents that they should send me to the city to continue my studies. My parents were poor, and thought it was impossible for them to send me on to high school. At that time tuitions were high. Finally it was decided that I would attend the Tallinn Boys Business School, which was four years old, and where, in addition to general education subjects, a range of practical subjects was offered, such as bookkeeping, typing, business correspondence, etc. My mother hoped that I could become the business manager of the Riisipere general store. I went to live with aunt Anni and uncle Eedi on Koidu Street. After the economic crash they lived in modest circumstances in a two-room basement apartment in a three-story apartment building. Aunt Anni was the caretaker in the building. Uncle Eedi had turned one room of their apartment into a workshop. So the three of us all lived together in one small room. There was an electric burner and cold water. That was about the extent of it.

After I had attended the Business School for three years, I transferred to the commercial high school, which was located in the same building. I had to take some subject examinations. In the spring of 1942 I went to driving school just in case, and obtained my truck driver's license. During the war they were only training truck drivers. I thought that in turbulent times, it would be an advantage to know how to drive. In spring 1943 I got mobilization orders for the German army. The Germans had already had plenty of time to demonstrate what they thought of Estonians, and of Estonian efforts to restore their independence. It was clear to the schoolboys of our district that we were not going to join the German Army. The alternatives were to hide in the woods or flee to Finland. We heard that there were plans to form an Estonian unit in the Finnish Army. We decided to join the Finnish Army as volunteers, in

order to come back when the time was right to help restore Estonian independence.² We started to plan our escape to Finland. This took place on 13 May 1943. There were 13 of us. We left the beach in a rowboat, and rowed to the island of Little Malusi. A motorboat was to pick us up there and take us to Finland. We had to pay the boatman with all sorts of gold items and quite a lot of money. But the motorboat never came. The next day, when it got light we were seriously worried that the German border patrol would discover us, since the island was totally bare and treeless. There were only a few small sheds where fishing gear was kept. We were fortunate enough to lie there for a whole day without the German border patrol finding us. When it got dark we heard a motorboat approaching the island. Our spirits rose, finally they were coming to get us. But these were two youths, brothers, who were frightened by the sight of us. They had come to pick up their fishing gear from the sheds. We started to work on them to convince us to take us to Finland. They were skeptical: they did not have enough petrol, no compass, and no map. But we kept insisting. We showed them how many valuables and how much money they would get if they agreed. Finally one of the brothers was willing to take us to Finland, while the other one remained behind to guard the valuables. The trip to Finland went without incident. The night was clear. The boatman kept on course by following the stars. There was enough petrol to get us to the Finnish *skär*. A Finnish border patrol boat towed us to an island. From there we were taken to Helsinki harbor.

Arved Veemets, Kalju Pajupuu, and Endel Nõmpere had previously sung popular songs in a quartet. Their fourth member, a tenor, had joined the German army. I began standing in for him. Veemets made up his own words to the well-known songs. He had his own guitar along. Our group also included Arved Viirlaid³ and my schoolmate from Riisipere, Raimond Viik. Arvi Moor also came to Finland in our boat, but he did not join the army. We were given two weeks in

² "Finnish Boys," see Glossary.

³ Arved Viirlaid (1922–), prolific Estonian poet and writer who served in the ranks of the Finnish Boys. After the end of World War II, he first fled to Sweden, then lived in England from 1945–53, and emigrated to Canada in 1953. Best known for his novel of World War II *Ristideta hauad* (Graves Without Crosses, 1952), which has been translated into numerous languages, and which has explicated Estonia's destiny during and after WWII with luminous fictional clarity.

Helsinki before we were officially admitted to the army and sent to field training camp in Jalkala. There were already four groups of Estonian boys there ahead of us, so we were put in a fifth group, the famous Val-lila battalion. General Pajari, the division commander, was renowned for his service in the Winter War. The training consisted of intensive drilling, since General Pajari was scheduled to come to inspect the unit ten days later. The big day came, 8 June 1943. General Pajari arrived astride a white horse and gave a speech. Among other things, he said that the Finns were abundantly aware that Estonia had been hit by tragic events, and that Estonia had nowhere to turn for help. The Estonian landscape did not have the same defense capacity as Finland. He recommended that the Finns pay more attention to what the Estonians were saying, who by now knew Russians better than they did. Our free time was devoted to preparations for Victory Day (*Võidupüha*).⁴ We built an amphitheatre and decorated the area around our barracks. The Victory Day celebration began with the raising of the Finnish and Estonian flags. There were speeches and choral singing, followed by basketball matches. We thought that the Estonian people had placed high hopes in us, and we felt the weight of that responsibility. Our job was to prepare ourselves for the right moment, when we would be needed to help restore independence.

In September we were taken to the front. Our segment of the front was on the banks of Rajajoki, between the sea and the Leningrad railway, where the peacetime border had been. It was about forty kilometers from there to Leningrad. The front was stable. There was constant fire from the Russian side, both light and heavy artillery. It was a rainy, muddy autumn. Water leaked into the bunkers. Rats appeared. During certain intervals there were so few of us that we were on guard patrol for two hours, then were allowed to sleep for two hours, followed by another shift of guard duty. Just before Christmas relief arrived, and we spent Christmas and New Year's Eve close to the front as a reserve unit. After New Year's we were sent back to the front. We had to wear white clothing so that the enemy sharpshooters would not discover us too easily. But our men still were hit, as was I. I had a light wound, near my right knee. Luckily I had not been hit by a fragmentation shell, which was often used by Russian sharpshooters. My wound healed after a stay in the hospital. During the time I was on leave in Helsinki,

⁴ Victory Day (*Võidupüha*), see Glossary.

there was a major air raid. One evening about ten days later I saw a great glow in the sky to the south. My first thought was, now they are probably bombing Tallinn. This was true.

At the beginning of April, mumps infected our camp. The most severe cases, myself included, were sent to hospital. One morning the rumor spread like wildfire through the hospital that they were bringing large numbers of our wounded boys from Jalkala. I went out to meet them to find out what had happened. The boys I saw were unable to speak. They had sooty faces, many were half-naked, wearing only their belts and a few scraps of clothing held together by a belt. Some said the Russians had attacked Jalkala, others, that a frightful explosion had destroyed it totally. What really happened was that on the night of 17 April a barracks had exploded, where 300 mines, ammunition, and grenades were stored. Everyone had been told that this was the storage place for tools, not ammunition. The barracks caught on fire and many rushed to extinguish the fire. One of the most popular officers, lieutenant Kokamägi knew what was really in the barracks. He ran to the site and wanted to send the boys away, but he was too late. He and 27 men were killed instantly. Many were torn to pieces by the incredible pressure wave. Body parts were found in the tops of trees. The total number of dead was 32, with 70 wounded. The reason for the explosion was never discovered. At any rate I was very grateful that I had not been there at the time. After my release from hospital I had one week of leave in Helsinki. When I returned to Jalkala, the most obvious signs had been erased, but it could still be seen what a huge accident had happened there.

In June 1944 the Russians began a major offensive. At first there were two hours of heavy cannon fire directed at the front line trenches. Fighter planes bombed the areas around the front lines. Soon we were given orders to assume our defensive positions, in order to prevent the Finnish unit from being cut off and surrounded. We were able to halt the Russians' advances. We were praised for this in General Pajari's daily bulletin. Four comrades-at-arms and I were able to slip through the tanks and retreat through the woods to our main unit. Later our battalion was assigned to cover the Finnish forces' retreat. We beat back the Russian attack and were able to pull back quietly, unnoticed by the enemy. We retreated for four days and nights, practically with no food or sleep. Now we realized the value of the physical training at Jalkala. The city of Viipuri had fallen the previous day. For a short time

we manned defensive positions on Viipuri Bay. After that the front remained more or less stable. The Russians had begun a major offensive in Estonia at this time. Pskov was taken on 23 July, and a few days later Narva had fallen as well. Many of us wanted to go back to Estonia. Our commanders, led by our “spiritual father” Captain Talpak, contacted underground political figures in Estonia. There was a plan to declare the independence of the restored Estonian republic. Contact was also made with the German authorities. Our conditions were that our regiment, JR 200, would be allowed to operate as a unit, that we could bring along our own weapons, and that the Germans would not be allowed to interfere with us. It was hard to make a decision. Returning was completely voluntary. The results of the vote were 1,728 for and 163 against. Why did such a large majority want to go back to Estonia? Why did I go back? I doubted very sincerely whether this was the right moment. The restoration of independence seemed utopian, hardly any of us would escape with our lives. But in 1918 a miracle had happened. Why could it not happen again in 1944? In such a case going back was our duty to our fatherland, and toward ourselves, too, in part. We had fled to Finland, and if we were needed in Estonia, we had to fulfill our vow. On the 18th of August we arrived in Hanko. There the Finnish higher military authorities gave us speeches of gratitude. Marshal Mannerheim’s appeal was read out, which stated that this was not the right moment to go. But Mannerheim understood that if one’s own house was burning, all of the men want to go to put out the fire. In Hanko we found out that the Germans would not allow us to bring our weapons, and for some strange reason, we could not bring our backpacks either. Paper bags were distributed. We looked like prisoners-of-war, not heroes. In Hanko there was still an opportunity to reconsider. Only 76 men changed their minds and remained in Finland.

On 18 August we boarded onto the German ship *Wartheland*. According to the documents we were 1,752 men. Later more men were added, and thus there were slightly over 1,800 returnees. The ship was directed to Paldiski instead of Tallinn. Our return was kept secret. But the news had spread among the people anyway, so that when our train pulled out of Paldiski toward Nõmme, there were crowds of people in the stations greeting us. Women were in folk costume. The reception in Keila was very festive. Half an hour before the train arrived the people had heard of our arrival. In that time a choir had been assembled. Late in the evening we marched from Nõmme to camp at Männiku.

Nothing in particular happened there over the next few days. I went on to Riisipere. At the same time my mother and brother had gone to the Männiku camp to see me. Father was home at Riisipere, and that was to be the last time I would ever see him. Later I met up with my mother and brother. My brother was fourteen years old and asked me to organize things so that he could come with us to the front. I told him I disapproved of this stupid idea. Our first battalion was sent to the Tartu front. The second battalion was put in the Kehra training camp. The weapons that were distributed to us were of much poorer quality than what we had had in Finland. There was a particular shortage of automatic pistols, which were a dire necessity in battles in the woods, for which we had received special training. The Russians had created a bridgehead north of the River Emajõgi. Our first task was to destroy this and to purge the forest of enemies. As it later turned out, we were able to accomplish this after three days of attack. But more than half of the men were out of commission, either fallen or wounded. On the first day of the attack my friend Arved Veemets was shot in the stomach. We carried him to the dressing station. He was conscious, but died soon after. We had hoped that the boys from our second battalion would be brought in as reinforcements. Instead we were sent young men without any military training whatsoever.

The morning of 17 September at Pilka. We were awakened by horrible cannon fire. Suddenly someone shouted, "Russians in the yard!" One part of our reinforcements took to their heels. Our attempts to stop them were unsuccessful. I had a light machinegun, a so-called German 1000-shot gun. We lay down in the corner of the yard and started to fire on the approaching Russians. We stopped their direct onslaught on the farm, but they outflanked us. Nõmpere got carried away and fired a few shots from his regular gun. Then he was hit by a burst of bullets in the chest. Death came instantly. Since I was one of the last ones in the yard, I retreated as well. The Tartu front collapsed. We tried to get to Tallinn, where Pitka was to assemble the Estonian army.⁵ The restoration of Estonian independence was to be declared. On the way to Tallinn we heard that it had fallen. This was on 22 September. As we found out later, Uluots had indeed declared the Estonian republic on 18 September, and appointed a government, with Otto Tief as the deputy prime minister.

⁵ Admiral Johan Pitka, Otto Tief's government, Jüri Uluots, see Glossary.

The only alternative that remained to us was to flee to Sweden via Saaremaa. We had a truck and about 25 men, among them Undla and my friend and Raimond Viik, my schoolmate from the Nissi elementary school. At the last moment we got over on the ferry. In Saaremaa, the German military police, popularly referred to as the “chain-dogs” gave us a hard time.⁶ We were able to evade them since our vehicle had a more powerful motor. We were about to spend the night in a haybarn when Undla got news that his acquaintances had secured places in a boat, and that their small passenger car would be left at the beach. We could take it over. Since I had been proactive and gotten myself a driver’s license in Tallinn, Undla put me on the back of his motorcycle and we drove to the beach to pick up the car. I was to take the car and Undla the motorcycle, and drive back for the other boys. It got dark and we decided to spend the night in the Kihelkonna church-manor at the home of pastor Endel Kõpp. At night the “chain-dogs” were out on the roads in force. Up till now they had left the church manor alone. The next morning, when we got back to the other boys, it turned out that the Germans had made an unexpected raid during the night and taken all the boys to a ship at Kuressaare. Now there were just the two of us, Undla and myself.

We were finally fortunate enough to get onto a fishing boat. This boat had already been back and forth between Sweden and Estonia several times. We left from the beach near Kihelkonna, and on the morning of 3 October reached the vicinity of Fårö island. In the darkness the boat ran aground hard, and started to collect water. Panic stuck. The *kannel*⁷ belonging to “Kandle Juss” was trampled to pieces. We dipped our clothes in gasoline and made a fire until they saw us from the beach. A fisherman came, picked up women and children, in return for a bottle of cognac. Someone had brought a whole case of cognac. Later many fishermen came, all of them picked up women and children, and everyone got a bottle of cognac. Strong, brave men that we were, we sawed one of the masts off, and kept the waves from beating the ship to pieces on the sharp cliffs. Later we were towed to Fårösund harbor.

⁶ “Chain-dogs” (*ketikoerad*) referred to the chain worn as part of the uniform of German military police.

⁷ The *kannel* is a stringed folk instrument resembling a zither.

When we had happily set foot on Swedish soil, the *lotas*⁸ came with hot cocoa and tasty sandwiches. This was the most delicious food I had ever eaten. I remember the first night on the floor of the Farsund school gymnasium. It seemed like my life had been given back to me like a gift. Many of my friends had not been so lucky. What had I done to deserve this? What was my mission? Many possibilities were open to me. I owed it to my fallen friends: to figure out how it would be possible to prevent war in the future. But what could I do? I was at absolute zero, like a newborn: no knowledge of the language, no money, no clothing, friends or relatives; I could not write to my parents, since then they would be put on the black list and the threat of Siberia would hover over them. All the same, we all hoped we could get back to Estonia soon.

We were given a fine welcome, taken to Visby, given new clothes, taken to Vetland, and Asljunga (in southern Sweden), where another boy and I were housed in a room in a two-family dwelling. My roommate, Arvo Põldre, had studied medicine in Tartu for a few years. Both of us started making plans to continue our studies. One has to hand it to the Swedes for their organizing capacity. Over the course of a few weeks 30,000–35,000 Estonians arrived, and everyone was given food, shelter, and clothing. At the time they did not offer us Swedish language instruction at state expense as they did for later refugees. But we had not expected this, either.

We hoped that Estonia would be free again, one way or another. We had heard of the Atlantic Charter and the right of peoples to self-determination, but we knew nothing of yet about the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact or the Yalta conference.⁹ I thought it best to pass the time by continuing my studies, waiting for the time we could go back to rebuild our independent republic. At the beginning of the new year I wrote to all the universities and asked for information about continuing my studies. Foreigners were not eligible for stipends or student

⁸ *Lottorna* (*Lotas*): common name for Swedish Women's Voluntary Defense Service (*Riksförbundet Sveriges lottakårer*), an auxiliary defense organization of the Swedish Home Guard (part of the Swedish Armed Forces), created in 1924 on the model of the Finnish women's auxiliary organization *Lotta Svärd*, founded in 1921. Among their several roles during World War II, the *Lottorna* provided refugee relief (welcoming committees at the harbour, food and clothing for refugee camps).

⁹ Atlantic Charter, Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, Yalta Conference, see Glossary.

loans, so our choices were either to earn enough in the summer to last through the winter, or to study and work at the same time. Both of us got ourselves jobs doing the best-paid work available—piecework, cutting peat in the peat-bog. Toward the autumn it became clear to us that the money we had saved would not be enough, and that we would have to work and study on the side.

We traveled to Stockholm and found out how difficult the struggle with bureaucracy can be. No residence permits for Stockholm were issued to refugees. Without a residence permit, one could not find employment. There was a great shortage of apartments. With persistence and stubbornness we were able to overcome all obstacles in the end. We were issued residence permits for three months, which for the next few years had to be extended every three months. Finally we succeeded in getting a permit for a longer period. Between the two of us we got a simple and easy job at the lowest pay bracket of civil service, pounding soil at the State Agricultural Control Commission. We pulverized soil samples so that the chemists could determine its chemical composition. We prepared and wallpapered a room for ourselves on the attic floor of the soil warehouse. Between the two of us we paid only 15 kroner a month; electricity, gas, and heating were free. One of us always had to be on the spot to heat the oven to dry the soil samples. We took turns attending lectures. I began studying governmental economics (*national-ekonomi*) at Stockholm University, my friend attended the Karolinska Institute to study medicine. In summer 1946 we washed dishes at the Grand Hotel in addition to pounding soil. We were able to get meals in addition to our pay. At one point Greta Garbo lived in that hotel. The waiters showed us the plates from which the idolized and world-renowned actress had dined.

There were several thousand Estonians living in Stockholm. Soon an Estonian society was created there, many organizations were founded, such as the Estonian Committee (1 March 1944), the Estonian Elementary School, the Estonian High School, and several choirs. They began publishing Estonian newspapers, and soon after that Estonian books (there were publishing houses outside Stockholm, too). At the university I met Estonian students, and made contact with other young people my age, former Finnish Boys, artists, musicians, poets, etc. A small circle of young people began meeting in cafes to discuss social questions, political ideas, culture and education. In our opinion there was a need for future moral, cultural, and political reconstruction in

Estonia and Western Europe. One dictatorship had been buried, but another one had triumphed, and it threatened all of western culture and social order. The major Western powers had lent a helping hand to all of Eastern Europe falling victim to Communism. Many western politicians were very naive, former president Franklin Roosevelt among them. Östen Unden, Sweden's foreign minister at the time claimed that Stalin's Soviet Union was characterized by rule of law. Unden was a famous law professor with an international reputation. Sweden returned the refugees' boats, handed over Estonian gold, extradited Baltic soldiers, and sent letters to Estonian refugees with the recommendation that they repatriate. Many Estonians fled in great fear to America and Canada. Many of our politicians from the older generation devoted themselves to slandering one another and to power struggles. We had no interest in their conflicts. We had felt the impact of two dictatorships on our own skin, and we also knew how democracy had been muzzled in Estonia in the 1930s. Our question was what a thriving and effective democracy would look like. To find out, we founded the Radical Democratic Union. Noteworthy young people who either belonged to the Union or who supported us in Sweden were Vahur Linnuste, Imant Rebane, Peeter Tõnus, Kalju Lepik, Raimond Kolk, Ilmar Mikiver, Olev Mikiver, Harri Kiisk, Ilmar Laaban, Ivo Iliste, Vaptas Urke, Jüri Seim, Max Lasberg, Ilmar Talve, Hans Sarap, Harri Olt, and the undersigned. Besides that many other supporters joined us in Canada and the USA. We began publishing the magazine *Radical Democrat*. I bought a small Hermes travel typewriter, and on that I printed all the issues of the *Radical Democrat*. Kalju Lepik and Raimond Kolk made copies. They had the opportunity to borrow the Estonian National Fund copy machine. We published eight issues of *Radical Democrat*. Later we published *Vaba-Eesti*, which had been started by Imant Rebane. We got contributions of articles from the USA and Canada as well (I. Talve, H. Ainso, H. Grabbi, H.S. Hunt, I. Mikiver, Ü. Sinberg, H. Valdsaar, L. Vaska, V. Vaska).

Choir-singing has always been an activity characteristic of Estonians. So it was in Sweden as well. Already in 1948 an Estonian song festival was organized in Stockholm's nature park in Skansen. After the Skansen song festival I joined the Youth Choir. I was 24 years old. The choir director was Olav Roots, the legendary conductor of the Estonian Radio Symphony orchestra. Many Estonian girls sang in that choir. So it happened that I found myself a wonderful girl, Salme Saving, who

became my life partner for 38 years, and the mother of our two delightful children. Ours was a great love, a love beyond all others—or so we thought. There were many who found their mates in that choir. We were married on 22 July 1950. Even before I had a chance to graduate from university, on 30 October 1950, I got a job in the research department of the State Agricultural Office, where fifteen researchers and ten assistants studied developments in expenses, profits, and prices in Swedish agriculture; based on the results, the annual price agreement was signed between the state and agricultural organizations. I spent the better part of my working life in this capacity, and for the last twenty years was the head of the office. Meanwhile, I had postponed submitting my application for citizenship: I did not want to do push-ups anymore with young boys in the military. Military service would also have meant a decrease in my income. But as a state employee I was obligated to be a Swedish citizen, and so I did, in 1953. Housing was an issue, but luckily it was solved. On 15 January 1954, we moved to Solna. Hannes was born that same year on 31 August. Karolinska Hospital was the only one at that time that allowed fathers to be present at births. I had attended “fathers’ courses,” where we were told that if we, new fathers, fainted, no one would help us. I did not faint. Quite the contrary, it was a deeply meaningful experience for me to see the birth of my son.

After Stalin’s death the situation in Russia became a bit more open. In 1956 I risked writing to my own parents under a false name. I hoped that they would recognize my handwriting. My mother did. For quite a while we exchanged letters at false addresses.

Our discussions in the Radical Democratic Association came to the conclusion that in the future it would be impossible to preserve peace in Europe without nations giving up a part of their sovereignty. We changed our name to Freethinking Federalists, and thanks to Vahur Linnuste, who had moved to Paris, we made contact with the European Federalists Association, which had its headquarters in Paris. In summer 1959, Nikita Khrushchev, the dictator of the Soviet Union, was to visit Sweden. Together with Max Lasberg and Thelma we were on vacation on the island of Bornholm. We decided to write a letter of protest to the newspaper *Arbetaren*, known for its steadfast opposition to dictatorship. We worked on the text intensively. When it was ready, we drove to the airport at the last minute, and heard on the radio that the visit had been postponed. Khrushchev came later, in 1964.

Camilla was born on 13 June 1963. Because of an epidemic I could not be present at her birth. But we celebrated the birth of our daughter all the more at home. Every day I went to the hospital and stood outside. Salme held up Camilla at the second-floor window.

I was not aware that my job was a good platform for international contacts, but that's how it turned out. In late autumn 1963, I was asked to participate in an European Free Trade Association (EFTA) experts' meeting in Geneva. The European Economic Community (EEC) had been founded in 1957. Its members were Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Holland, and West Germany. The purpose of cooperation was to create a European free market, with the ultimate goal of preventing war, particularly between Germany and France. The EFTA nations had agreed to lift all duties on industrial products permanently in 1970. The agreement did not extend to agricultural products, however. The EFTA ministers had decided that agricultural experts had to form a committee to draw up proposals for enhancing trade in agricultural products as well. I was asked to take part in the preparatory meeting. I did not have much practice in spoken English, but what was required in this new situation was an active working knowledge of the language. I had serious doubts. Salme believed in my abilities more than I did myself. When I arrived, we were informed that the Swedish representative had to chair the meeting. Since this was my first international meeting, I asked my Danish colleague to take over the role; besides, I had never chaired a meeting in English. In summer 1964 I was approached a second time, and asked to participate in the first EFTA Agricultural Committee meeting in Geneva. Now there were three of us representing Sweden. The committee worked together until 1972, and two meetings were held each year. I took part in all of them. In June I took my family along, and afterwards we would spend our vacation in Italy on the shores of the Mediterranean. In November 1964 I was invited to be the Swedish representative to the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) conference in Paris. In January 1965 there was a seminar in Geneva on the problem of how to supply ourselves with foodstuffs if we were completely cut off from the outside world.

In November 1967 the Soviet authorities gave my mother and brother permission for a one-month visit to Sweden. We got a more complete picture of life in Estonia. I was surprised that such fear had been instilled in my brother that he did not dare say anything about

life there. He had been told that he was not to talk about politics. My mother, by contrast, spoke of everything openly.

According to the decision of the government and parliament, the Agricultural Administration had to move from Stockholm to Jönköping in 1977. Only one of my assistants came along, and only about half of the 15 academics. I, too, would have had an opportunity to get a job in another government institution, but the work assignments there were not very attractive to me. So I decided to go along. Hannes, who was studying at the technical university, and who had been living at home, now had to live on his own. Camilla came along and had to switch schools. A major disadvantage was leaving the Estonian community and our friends and acquaintances. But most of my work took place in Stockholm, and thus I had to be away from home two or three days each week.

One of the United Nations subdivisions was the FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization), located in Rome. The task of one of the FAO's committees was to provide a ten-year outlook of the world nutritional situation. In the 1970s I took part in these meetings as a member of the Swedish delegation. In February 1981 my executive director asked me to receive an important visitor from Zambia, the prime minister's right-hand man. I knew that the Forestry Department had a big black limousine with a liveried chauffeur. I borrowed it to meet the distinguished guest at the airport. Strangely enough, it seemed that the guest was not particularly impressed with the limousine and chauffeur. He said he was making the rounds of European countries trying to find people who would help him build up an administration that would bring Zambia's price and income politics into harmony. That same fall a four-member delegation was sent from Sweden to Zambia to clarify what needed to be done. Besides me, the delegation included representatives from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the Agricultural Research Institute, and the State Price Control Bureau. We wrote our report and presented it to the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). This was my first introduction to Africa. At the beginning of 1982 SIDA offered me work as a consultant in Kenya, at first for one year, to advise them in building up an organization for marketing agricultural goods and shaping price policy. At first I was against the idea. We had just bought a house. Camilla was in high school in Australia, Hannes was working in New York. If I went to Africa, it would mean that our family of four would be scattered in four different parts of the world. But Salme, whose work kept her from

accompanying me thought I should accept the offer. I worked in Kenya for one year, studying local marketing and pricing policy, and offered my suggestions, even though high government officials did not have a serious intention of following my proposals. I came home for midsummer's eve 1983. For the first night I almost did not sleep. I marveled at the northern light. Camilla had also just returned from Australia. Just a few days after my return home she had celebrated her 20th birthday. Now the whole family was reunited again in Sweden.

Three months after my return home I got a high fever, which peaked again a little later; I started to suspect malaria. The tests were done, but they found no malaria. The fits of fever recurred more and more frequently. Each time we went to the hospital for more tests. The doctors were more or less convinced that I had some kind of tropical disease. Only two years later did my medical history fall into the hands of a doctor who suspected a tumor of the colon. We wrote a will and I had an operation. It was a malignant tumor, but I was cured.

When I returned from Kenya I was informed that our proposals for the Zambia project had been approved by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). Now SIDA asked me to take over the leadership of the project. Along with the colleagues with whom I had visited Zambia in 1981, I had to travel to Africa again in autumn 1984. This project lasted from 1982–1987, and was unique with respect to SIDA's work as a whole. For the first time SIDA attempted to influence social structures on a very high level, attempting to make them more democratic. Along with the prime minister I was to inform journalists of our project, and to give my opinion of the Zambian economy. The prime minister asked me not to be too critical at the press conference. So I stated that Zambia's economy had made great strides forward, but that there was nothing that could not be improved upon. The next day my statement was on the front page of Zambia's largest English-language newspaper, as if this were important news. There was a large picture of the prime minister and I. Since I was a representative of the Swedish government, I could not damage good relations with Zambia. The project did not achieve the results we had hoped for. Now I had experience in two African countries. I visited Nairobi a few years after completing my work. All the faces there were new, and no one knew anything of my proposals. Some of the projects, such as the Kenyan water supply, and the seed-improvement and surveying project in Zambia were

successful, but unfortunately many of them were unsuccessful. Perhaps the expectations were too high.

On 4 July 1987 Salme had a sudden fall, and one side of her body was paralyzed. She had a thrombosis of a vein in her head. The doctors said she would survive, and that the paralysis would abate over time. In retrospect I think they just wanted to console me. The end came late on the night of 5 July. This was one of the unhappiest days of my life. I tried to deny the sad truth at first. Two weeks later, when I was with a colleague in Zambia, I saw Salme clearly in a dream. She came to me, young and healthy, and said, "I am with you, do not be sad." It was so real that I believed it. One never gets over a loss like that. It only sinks a little bit deeper.

In 1988 my cousin Julius, a doctor, wrote saying that my mother was so ill that it was not certain how long she would live. He suggested that I come and visit her. He suggested that he could send an invitation, and that I could submit an application to the Soviet Embassy to visit my mother in Tallinn. In those days no permission was given for visits outside Tallinn. I thought this was very bureaucratic and complicated. Instead I subscribed to a group excursion to Tallinn through the Soviet tourist agency, "Inturist." I took both of my children along, and Camilla's fiancé, Stefan. At that time there was no direct sea connection between Stockholm and Tallinn. We travelled to Helsinki and on from there to Tallinn on the ship *Georg Ots*. On the ship I asked the tour guide whether it would be possible for us to visit my elderly mother, who lived in Riisipere, about 50 km from Tallinn. The reply was that if we rented an Inturist bus and a guide, it was possible. When I explained that Riisipere was my home, and that I had no need of a tour guide to visit my old, sick mother, the guide only answered that those were the rules.

Forty-four years had passed since I was last in Tallinn, and my children had never been there. The unbelievably time-consuming border procedures took two or three hours until we got through customs and met our relatives. All of them were standing on the pier, carrying flowers and blue-black-and-white flags. I did not even recognize all of the relatives. The welcome was genuinely heartfelt and warmed the soul. My children said, "Think of it, here everyone speaks Estonian, even outdoors!" They were used to speaking Estonian at home and Swedish outside the home. My cousin Julius said he would first take me to meet the Estonian minister of agriculture. At first I firmly refused, saying

I did not want to meet any communist ministers. Julius said that this was purely a private meeting. He and the Minister of Agriculture, Vello Lind, had adjacent summer homes. We drove out of Tallinn a little way and met Vello Lind. We sat together for several hours and had an interesting conversation. I spoke about my activities, and he spoke of the problems in Estonian agriculture. Vello Lind thought that my African experience might be helpful for Estonia as well. He knew very well that as long as Moscow made the decisions, it would be very difficult to accomplish anything. He gave me a videotape of the "Singing Revolution,"¹⁰ which had taken place in the summer of that year at the song festival amphitheatre. I met with Vello Lind several times later on, and we discussed agricultural problems. In 1990 he organized a week-long tour of Estonia for me and one of my colleagues, to acquaint us with the problems of Estonian agriculture. In those days everything still went through Moscow, and it was impossible to achieve anything.

On New Year's Eve we went to Riisipere. My nephews Andres and Märt parked their cars a little way away from the Viru Hotel. We said nothing in the hotel, and no one stopped us. The road that 44 years ago had been a winding gravel road was now a straight asphalt highway. We visited Mother, who was still living in our old farmhouse. Much had changed. The area around the house was totally bare. There was no trace of the cowshed or the sauna. When I had last been there in 1944, large lilac bushes, apple, plum and cherry trees had been growing there, and a hedge of fir trees provided shelter from the west wind. Unexpectedly, Mother was in good shape. There was a festive table laid in the room. In many other homes we had the same experience: even though there were practically no foodstuffs to be found in shops, festive tables were set for guests. It was said that it was possible to find quite a lot either through barter or connections. We savored the food and had a pleasant conversation. Of course, as Estonians always do, we sang together. After the meal we handed around New Year's gifts. Later we went back to Heino and Helga's place, where we welcomed the new year. Outside I met several people who claimed to be my schoolmates. But time had done its work, and my schoolmates had been erased from my memory, at least at that moment.

I retired later that same year, in 1989. The staff had organized an unbelievably fine send-off. I was surprised by the fact that my secretary

¹⁰ "Singing Revolution," see Glossary.

came to pick me up in a large limousine. Then we drove to another colleague's house, who was also retiring. At the place where they were holding the party, all of the staff was standing outside to greet us, and there was a fine meal; gifts were distributed; later there was a dance. I had finished a chapter of my life. At the invitation of Agricultural Minister Vello Lind, I visited Estonia once again in 1989. Before beginning the journey I heard that my mother had died. My relatives promised to delay the funeral until I arrived. After visiting the ministry and a tour of *kolkhozes* and *sovhozes* I went to Riisipere to my mother's funeral. At first we were at home in our own large main room. The casket was open. Mother's face looked very peaceful. She had been given a long, arduous life, and death had come just before her 93rd birthday. The funeral continued in Nissi church, and finally at the graveyard. Afterwards there was a memorial gathering with relatives and friends. I stayed in Riisipere until the great song festival.¹¹ The experience of that song festival is impossible to put into words. All who attended understood what it meant. It was the first time in a long period when certain forbidden songs could be sung publicly. It was like the continuation of the "Singing Revolution." A people who in this way peacefully demonstrates its highest wish to be free and independent, must achieve it. After the song festival I returned home. At Tallinn airport I met my old friend Peeter Tõnust, who said that our old friends and comrades-at-arms were to have a reunion at his place in Saltsjöbaden.

As a retiree I had more time, and started playing golf. Previously I had thought that this game was nothing but walking, but I soon found out that if you played 18 holes, you had walked about four hours and almost ten kilometers. I kept up my swimming once a week. I also began to study French intensively, and significantly improved my language skills. At the same time I attended a weekly English conversation group in order not to forget that language. At the beginning of 1991 I met Lilian. She is four years younger than I and also widowed. We started to meet, and our relationship has lasted seven years. We live half of each week together, half separately. We have travelled together a fair bit.

¹¹ Song festival, see Glossary. This is the second song festival on Estonian soil mentioned in Hans Lebert's life story. Clearly, the meaning of "singing revolution" alludes to the power of the song festival in raising national pride and consciousness during the era of national awakening in the 19th century.

In 1994 when Lilian and I were in Estonia, our friends organized a car trip to Saaremaa. It was an unbelievably intense experience to see Saaremaa for the second time after 50 years. We also visited the Kihelkonna church manor, where we once spent several nights. The anniversary celebrations of the Finnish Boys in 1994 were memorable. I received a medal from Elisabeth Rehn, then Minister of Defense of Finland, in gratitude for my participation in the Finnish struggle for independence. I was deeply touched by the reunion with former war buddies. With one of them we made a narrow escape during the great Russian offensive. When an unrecognizable man asked whether my name was Hans Lebert, I replied affirmatively. Then he said that I was the tenth bearded man he had asked. I did not recognize him until he told the story of how we escaped through the Russian front lines and tanks in Finland. It was one of the greatest experiences of my life to meet former "blood brothers," Arved Viirlaid and Kalju Pajupuu. We spent a memorable evening in Pajupuu's apartment in Mustamäe. We talked about the old times, and also about the fact that we were not happy with the present government.

In 1994 there was another great song festival, for the first time over a long time in free Estonia. Lilian and I were there. No matter how much I had explained to Lilian about song festivals, she had never believed that they could be so memorable. The partner-county of Jönköping was Rapla. Thanks to many enthusiasts, aid began flowing into Raplamaa even before Estonia became independent. I had often been asked to serve as translator in Rapla and in Jönköping. I translated study materials for Rapla county study circles. Once there were eight county governors (*maavanemad*) from Estonia visiting our county governor. I am a member of the board of the Swedish Estonian Association. I have given many talks and presentations about conditions in Estonia then and now, and about the course my own life has taken in that context. I am happy that I have so many wonderful relatives in Estonia. My brother Heino has two delightful sons and five grandchildren, one more than I do. It is a good thing that so many Estonians stayed in Estonia. If everyone had fled, there would be no Estonia left.

My deepest joy is in my children and grandchildren. They will carry on my life. I came to Sweden by force of circumstance. I brought the Lebert name here. Now there are already eight Leberts here. Indeed there is something they have inherited from Salme and me, and they will pass on the legacy of our lives.



Voodel Võrk

BORN 1925

There were two children in the family before me, my brother Erlich, and my sister Helju. I saw the light of day in the wintertime, on the 24th of February 1925. Hence I am exactly seven years younger than the Estonian Republic.¹

The beginning of my life was promising. My aunts came to look me over, bringing the customary cakes and pies, which they ate up themselves, and

praised me for being a good boy, the spitting image of my father. I have had to hear the second of these two comments all my life, the first one, unfortunately, not often enough.

I did not have much of a chance to enjoy life when trouble came running in from the doors and windows. There were sicknesses, many of them, actually, each one more serious than the next. The illnesses left their mark. I was short as a child. Later I grew to the Estonian (not the Harju) average,² but I was still the shortest among my brothers. I compensated for my short height by my strength. I am stronger than they are. I have also done more athletics than they have.

My first fragmentary memories are from the time when I was about three years old. I was wearing only a shirt, no pants, and was sitting on a bench by the table under the window, looking out. Just at that moment Father, who was repairing the roof, fell off the roof down into the sweetbrier bushes, right under the window. Another time I was standing in the same place and saw how some men seemed to be torturing

¹ The independence of the Estonian Republic was declared on 24 February 1918.

² Popular saying for average height or physique.

a young horse. They were gelding Ints, with whom I, too, later, had to work in the fields. The story about the bull came later, when I was a little older. My parents were not at home. The bull had pulled up a stake and was running around, dragging his chain. I got ahold of the iron ring at the end of the chain, but could not hold onto the bull. The bull dragged me along a little way behind him. Now I think back with horror, what might have happened if the bull had gotten angry. But he didn't. He was a good bull, with a kind of grayish hide.

When I was seven, maybe eight, another thing happened. It was the time of the summer grain harvest. Father had a certain mowing machine which dropped the grain by bushel loads and before it made its next round, it had to be swept out of the way by hand. Helju and I were gathering the sheaves. Soon the work was too much for me, I just didn't have the strength. Father promised to tan my hide if I did not do the work. The temperament I had inherited from Father flared, and we got in a serious fight. I told Father that I was going to shoot myself. And I went and did it. I knew where the short-barreled rifle was kept. I took it, crept under the thick fir hedge, leaned the barrel on a fir branch, aimed in the direction of the woods, so that I wouldn't hit anyone by accident, and fired a shot. I stayed in my hiding place, quiet as a mouse, to see what would happen next. They searched and searched but could not find me. Late at night I ventured out. The others didn't see me, only Mother, who was of course very happy that her boy was alive. She gave me some food and promised to talk with Father. Father understood that one could not be that strict, and this time the matter was solved without "striped trousers."³

Father was harsh and impulsive, and I took after him. I do not remember his having any big troubles with mother. If there were any, they were because of us. I never developed a warm relationship with my father, and I do not think the other children did, either. Our mother was a very good person, and helped solve our misunderstandings with Father.

When I was two years old, my brother Vetel was born, 5 years later my sister Virve, then my brother Hedi, and three years after that my sister Urve, who has unfortunately died.

Our playgrounds were the yard, the herb garden, and the woods. A large part of our childhood was spent in the woods. I still remember

³ A thrashing.

one of our favorite games, “The Squirrel and the Marten.” There was one marten, the rest were squirrels, and the marten had to try to catch the squirrels. The only catch was that you had to climb trees to play the game. It was forbidden to move along the ground. We did not smash birds’ nests up there, but watched from a distance holding our breath that the bird would not abandon its nest because someone had breathed on it.

Like my brothers and sisters, I did work in addition to playing games. In a farm family there is simply no other way. One of our jobs was taking the cows to pasture, and bringing them back. Once, when it was my turn to take the horse out, I had an accident. I let the horse get too far ahead, and he kicked me in the head. Already back then, Fate was looking out for me: it was lucky that the horse had not been shod. As a reminder, I have a scar on my head to this day. To comfort me I was taken to the country fair the next day.

Thanks to the fact that my childhood passed in a natural environment, I recovered from all of my illnesses and by the time I went to school I was a small but hardy boy.

My school journey⁴ turned out to be a long one—counting the holidays it was 28 years. I think the results do not measure up to the time spent. Education has always been in first place for me, a priority, as they say in today’s refined speech. The fact that things did not turn out as well as they might have was not my fault.

I began attending Rägavere Elementary School at the age of eight. I had mastered reading by this time, and arithmetic was no problem, either. There was some trouble because of that, actually. My teacher asked us to make 10 counting sticks at home. I knew how to add without them, and I told the teacher so. At first the teacher was peeved, but after he checked my knowledge, he was satisfied. When I finished school he gave me a nicely bound edition of the epic “Kalevipoeg.”

In the fall of 1943 I began my studies at the Jänedä Agricultural School. I dreamed of becoming an educated farmer. This schooling got interrupted a mere two weeks later. Unfortunately I was already 18 years old and the Great German Army needed cannon fodder. I got back to school a year later. In addition, I had fallen one year behind the others with whom I had started. I asked permission to do two grades in one year. Permission was given, on condition that I get the highest

⁴ See Introduction for the wider meaning of this locution.

marks (5s) during the first semester. I divided the days into minutes, even using part of the night with the school's permission, and achieved what I had set out to do. True, one "1" slipped in there, and there it stuck. However, on my diploma, there was the delicate red writing, "with honors."

My studies generally went without a hitch, but there was trouble, too. For example, on one occasion I had removed some tobacco products from the military storehouse. I took the lot to school and hawked it to the smokers. I was not a smoker myself, though I have tried. One day my merchandise case had been emptied. I confessed to school director Jaanvärk. The thief was found, and the director took the tobacco into his safekeeping. Then came a fine evening when the boys and I had sipped a few drinks. The boys started hankering for a smoke and started insisting that I go to the director and bring back some tobacco. The director was not at home, but his son Toomas, a little squirt of a lad at the time, was quite ready to stand in his father's stead. Once again it was alleged, that Võrk was not interested in studying at Jäneda. I succeeded in convincing the director that quite the opposite was true, and he restricted himself to assigning me to the pigsty for three days, during the long holidays, to be exact. Nothing terrible, actually. There were boys who never went home for the holidays, so I bought my freedom and was even able to make the trip home.

After completing my studies at Jäneda, I was assigned to work in Hiiumaa. I had the firm intention to go on to higher education, but despite graduating with honors, this opportunity was not offered to me. This was cause for some bitterness, and so I did not go to work, but rather, along with two other sports enthusiasts (Kulderknup and Vaht) enrolled in Tallinn's technical school for physical education. We were accepted into the second year and graduated from that school in 1949.

I did not abandon the idea of going on with my studies. In 1952 I enrolled as an extern in the Estonian Agricultural Academy⁵ in the field of agronomy. The first three courses went smoothly, then the Russian Army intervened, and even though this was only for three months, in combination with Eldi's death it derailed me for some time. I did not get my diploma until 1961. Sometimes I have the feeling that my studies were left incomplete. This has even been the way it is in my

⁵ An agricultural college, on par with university.

dreams, again and again. When I look at the diploma, I believe that the matter was completed.

I now had what I had striven for. I was a trained agronomist. But that had done little more for me than filling in the gaps in my knowledge. I did not get higher wages because of it, nor a better job. I did not even hope for this. I had remained—in part by my own choice—among the black sheep, and there was nothing else I longed for. I did not want to sell myself to the Party in the name of a career. Twice they made me an offer, but they did not get anywhere with it. I have no regrets. At least I have a clean conscience as far as that goes. Some of my schoolmates have indeed gone farther, some to deputy minister, some all the way to minister, one fine man even into the Estonian Communist Party Central Committee, and later to Parliament. I am not jealous.

Getting a candidate's degree was not among my goals. I already had a large family that demanded its own attention.

About the War

The war is a separate chapter of a life story, but definitely a theme I should elaborate on. It deserves its own story.

I should say at the outset that the war did not affect our family tragically. Both I and my older brother went to war (with the front lines running between us),⁶ but both of us came home.

I learned of the outbreak of war between Germany and the Soviet Union when we were in the Rekkasoo hayfield. Troska Kusti had brought the newspaper from Aegviidu and came to share the news with us. Of course that was not the real reason he came. My sister Helju had grown into a lovely young girl, and that was why the old bachelor went to all that trouble.

My more direct contact with the war came when a solitary Russian "forest patrol" sent a few bombs in our direction. After that came the mobilization, and my brother Erlich went with the Russians. The roundup was in the Tapa manor, and I went to take him with the horse. Stupidly I climbed in among the *nekrut*,⁷ and later they did not

⁶ That Estonian men found themselves "brother against brother" during World War II is not due to ideological convictions, but the logistics of mobilization into two occupying armies.

⁷ *Nekrut*—conscript into the Russian army, see Glossary.

want to let me go. With my brother's help things were cleared up and I was released and sent home.

My first personal contact with German soldiers was quite pleasant, since they spared us the trouble of killing a hog. Unfortunately they also accepted the burden of eating the meat themselves. It was much worse with the Estonian soldiers among them. They found themselves a campfire site in our pasture and a few cigarette butts on the ground. They thought there were Russians hiding there and of course I was supposed to know about it. One madman took me into the woods, face up against a tree, and started in with the interrogation. I had nothing to say. Then he said he would count to three, and when he got to three he would fire. I don't have anything to say about the fear, but my pants stayed clean. At "two" another man showed up in the woods. He barked at the first one, whose gun was probing my back: "Leave the boy alone!" And he did. So I got on my way with the knowledge of what it felt like to stand in front of a gun. I was sixteen at the time.

Later I was stupid enough to join the Home Guard.⁸ The wish to have my own gun got the better of me. And they did give me a rickety old Japanese relic. The little boy didn't need anything better, they thought. It was enough to shoot squirrels with, but I actually never even tried.

I did not last long in the Home Guard. My assignment was to guard the Pruuna Bridge, between Lehtse and Tapa. During one of my guard shifts two Germans came from the Tapa direction. I thought, "Let them go on in peace, why should I bother checking them over?" I did not know any German anyway, so I did not even bother to come out of my little guard booth. The Germans did not like this, checked my papers, and discussed something that of course I had no way of understanding. At headquarters they were said to have reported that I was asleep while on duty. I had not been sleeping, but they gave me a "wolf's pass"⁹ and I was not sad about it, either. By then I had had a chance to figure out that they did other things in the Home Guard besides keeping watch over bridges. I too had to stand guard with a gun at the door of a solitary cell where two people from my home village were being held, and who were not guilty of anything, as far as I could tell.

⁸ Home Guard, see Glossary.

⁹ That is, sent me packing.

Up till this point I had only smelled war from a distance. In the beginning of November 1943 things got serious. I was mobilized (in the *Soldbuch* there was an entry—*Freiwillige*—which meant volunteer) into the German Army. I received the orders at school. It was a pity to leave the school that I had struggled to get into, and where I had only had a chance to be for two weeks.

I left home on the morning of 4 November. It was not even three o'clock in the morning, when the neighbor awakened me by tapping at the door. Even he had come to send me off to war. Mother had already sent one son off, now it was my turn. If my brother had gone with the Reds, then I had to go to the other side. The following autumn we might almost have met in the battles for Tartu.

I had no real idea of what war was like. I had not seen death up close yet. Up to this point in my life, the only thing that could frighten me was a snake. I had no fear of the future, nor did I have any idea that this experience would become so very heavy and hard in places.

As agreed, I stopped by Raimond's place. From there the horse was to take us on. We had reached the main road when we heard a shout behind us. My father had limped through the forest on his injured leg in order to accompany me to the railway station. Raimond's father was our coachman. And so we rode off to war—two very young men with two World War I veterans. In the train station our schoolmates were waiting for us: all of them had the same road ahead of them. The girls were there, too. My first love, Hilja, fastened a pansy blossom to my lapel. Unfortunately, by the time I got back many other things had withered just like that pansy.

When I stood on the steps of the train, my father—who knew better than anyone else where it was we were going, stretched out his hand and said, "*Ole tubli!*" (Be brave!). I promised, "I'll try."

On 14 November we reached our destination, Kochanovska in southern Poland. Not far from the train station was *Heidelager*, which became our home for a month. Upon arriving there we were taken to the sauna, but just before I reached the appointed location, my stomach gave up on me.

In the *Heidelager* we were soon issued uniforms (three sets) and other war gear. We did endless boring marching drills on the heath. Some petty tyrants of commanders tried to develop a love of order in us by rumpling up our beds. To me this seemed like nothing more than a disgusting show of power that they took great pleasure in.

And then came the lice. We bumped back and forth for eleven days in “ox carriages”¹⁰ in a pile of chaff, with no lice whatsoever, but here, despite painstaking efforts to keep things clean, we became infested by those annoying house pets.

On 12 December we left *Heidelager*. In the early morning we were once again shoved into “ox carriages,” and we were off to the vast open spaces of Russia. On the 14th we arrived in Russia. The smoke pouring out of the train’s smokestack formed a perfect circle that hung for a long time in the motionless winter air. Later, when we were surrounded, I thought back on that circle as a bad omen. There was a longer stop in Kassatin. We put it to good use by supplementing our food supply. I brought three helpings of good, thick noodle soup from the station. Two I crammed into my belly, the third was in reserve. The more enterprising boys succeeded in selling some blankets at the market.

On the 17th we arrived in Korsun. Russia gave us an unfriendly welcome. It was cold, and a stiff east wind was blowing. We hopped around and shadowboxed in order to ward off the cold breath of Russia.

We were not given long to hop around. We settled ourselves into a column and *marsch!* to our living quarters, which were in Steblov. Upon arrival we were greeted by company commander Leicht, a one-eyed dried-up-looking fellow, who surprised us by making us—after a tiring journey—line up and scatter, several times over, since in his opinion we did not carry this off fast enough.

It was forbidden to go to the village, but we did it anyway. Rein and I got along well, and together we visited a certain woman. No, not for *that*—we went to trade thread, needles, and socks for meatpies, milk, and apples. She had a son in the Red Army, showed us her son’s picture, and showed pity for him by showing it to us. We went to Olshano to wheedle raw sugar from the sugar factory. Going to the village stopped when the unit commander, Saareke was shot. It had just been the day before that he had dreamed of going home on leave, and, when he was a bit tipsy, he tearfully recalled his elderly mother. He had been away from home for a long time, and now the partisans killed him. This happened on 19 January 1944.

We buried Saareke. The village and its surroundings were combed through. A few days later while training on the field behind the village we saw three gallows up on the hill, and they were not unoccupied.

¹⁰ Cattle cars.

A woman was hanging from one of them, and as I later heard, she was the local schoolteacher. Those gallows troubled our eyes, which were unused to death, until permission was given to the relatives to take the corpses down. After that, on pain of death, leaving the premises of our living quarters was strictly forbidden.

One afternoon we decided to organize a louse-killing competition. We took our shirts off, turned them inside out, and when Rein had counted to three, we were off. There was nothing to be heard besides a busy snuffing and the crunching of lice under our fingernails. When a very large beast crunched unusually loudly, the one who discovered it added a juicy comment. When I had topped one hundred, I got tired and quit.

The front was getting closer. It was the second day of hearing the drumming of cannonades from the southwest. Strange, why wasn't it coming from the east? Are we really being surrounded? I had just come from hospital and was in battle training with the rest of them. We ran in chain formation across a field, threw ourselves down, and then got up and ran again. When we got out to the edge of the field, we opened fire on the imaginary enemy. A short breather. The smokers lit cigarettes. Again the threatening drumming, like approaching thunder. War had come right up to our noses.

After he had finished his cigarette, the unit commander Aguraiuja¹¹ assembled us, and it started up again—*marsch-hinlegen-auf-marsch, marsch!* I was weak from having been ill, and could not keep up with the rest of them. Leicht, who was hauling along a big German sheep-dog noticed and sent the dog after me. With a few bounds, the strong animal caught up with me and shoved me into the snow. He didn't bite, but he didn't let me get up, either. He stared at me with his wise yellowish-brown eyes, and with astonishment I realized that there was not a shred of meanness in them. But by contrast there was a lot of it in Leicht's one remaining eye, which was gray and cold like the blade of a bayonet. Later I heard that I was not the only one whom Leicht set his dog after, and there were those who had had an opportunity to feel his teeth.

"The last ones in line get gnawed by the dog," quipped Aguraiuja, when I had gotten back to the other boys. No one laughed. The boys were tired. It was no use, we were soldiers, tin soldiers.

¹¹ The name means literally "Wood-Chopper."

The next morning we packed our backpacks. We were taken to the front, which had moved even closer to us. We rode on sledges, carrying only our weapons. The backpacks, which they promised would follow us, were lost. And so I lost my diary. I had neither paper nor writing implement to begin a new one.

Before evening we arrived at some sort of village. It was burning. Russian tanks had forced their way in the same morning, but had been beaten back. On the edge of a burned tank hung a corpse, head downward, burned to a crisp. This was the first dead man that I saw on a battlefield. Later there would be many more of them, unfortunately some of our boys, too.

We were lodged in a schoolhouse, where we rested until nightfall, when we were taken to our positions. The weather was gloomy, and the dampness penetrated the thin trench coats. We stepped through the mud, voiceless as shades. Near the last houses we were shown our positions, and we set to digging rifle pits and trenches. We tossed shovelful after shovelful of fertile soil, which was blacker than the night around us.

In the morning, when the fog, lifted we saw the Russian trucks and small cannon hopping around behind them, stubbornly crawling toward the west. Our suspicion began to assume the shape of truth—we were surrounded.

The next evening we received confirmation. The group leader (*rühmül*) Ruut took me to an empty house. We covered the windows with blankets and lighted our bunker candles. In that atmosphere of pent excitement Ruut announced briefly: “We’ve been surrounded. Help is coming, but we must not entertain high hopes. Get ready for a soldier’s death in battle.”

Unpleasant, extremely unpleasant. We were still too young to imagine ourselves dead. Perhaps many called to mind the Stalingrad tragedy,¹² though we did not know all the details. We were afraid that here, near the Dnieper, the same thing would repeat itself as happened a year ago by the Volga. Granted, there were fewer of us here, but that was no consolation, because even if the soup was thinner, we still had to eat it. Death is death, a repulsive thing in every respect, however honest it might be.

The next day claimed the first victim. On 9 February I was hit. I had piled some boards on top of my little nest to protect myself

¹² See Glossary.

against shell fragments. The explosions had messed them all up. When I started to tidy them, my right arm sank down as if hit by a whip. I became confused. I ran out of the trench and met the commander of the neighboring unit, who bandaged my arm and directed me to the commando point. On the way I had to lie down several times and crawl some of the way. I had no idea that crawling was actually more dangerous than enemy bullets. When I arrived, it was discovered that the cork of the grenade hanging from my belt had come undone, and was hanging on the end of a string. My life had been hanging from the same string, since if the cork had gotten caught on something, *Pauh!* No one would have been able to untangle my intestines.

I never met up with my own boys again. My main worry was finding something to eat. At one point I entered a house in search of food. In the kitchen a boy and an old man were busy at the stove. Porridge was bubbling in the pot. In the room sitting at a table were six to seven *Wehrmacht* officers. On the table was a steaming pot of boiled potatoes. What a delicious smell! The Germans were fishing potatoes out of the pot and eating them with relish. Timidly I stepped closer, and stretched my arm out single-mindedly toward the pot.

"Hau ab!" Barked an officer with a huge beaked nose.

My hand fell to my side. I was a wounded soldier of their army, after all. What a pack of wolves! The kitchen was empty, the porridge pot had been put aside to cool. I grabbed a tin from the corner, dished myself out a few ladlefuls, and holding the tin under my coat, took off. My honor was gone, but my stomach was full. One fine day, it must have been right before the end, when all kinds of stuff was being burned and they were no longer hoarding food, I was again wandering in the village with an empty belly, looking for anything at all that would not scream when bitten into. Whoever searches, finds. I looked down, there was some sort of bag on the ground, not completely empty. I "reorganized" it—it was sugar! I had dragged a gas mask cover along with me; it was good to put things in, if there was anything to be had. And now there was. I looked again: a horse and a harness, the horses were nibbling on something. I stepped up to get a closer look. What the devil—loaves of bread! Thinking took only a fraction of a second, if that. So what if the loaf had been chewed on, under the coat with it, and off I went!

The breakthrough began. Like water from behind a dam, a wave of people rushed onward. Everyone was spurred by the thought—life is ahead of us, death at our heels. But death was not merely behind

us—shells and mines were raining down on us from all directions. In addition we were being raked by machinegun and rifle fire. We were like a piece of iron being held with tongs on the anvil, and the enemy was pounding it with the full force of its fire.

We had to go. Everyone understood that.

The tanks were picking us off like sparrows. Men were falling like leaves from trees in an autumn storm. Our ranks were thinning quickly, but there were a lot of us, and some of us kept going. We ran through the lines of tanks. Forward! Faster! Only forward!

Trahh! I swayed, lost my hearing and sight for a moment, but revived immediately. I realized that I was alive. I was alive and totally healthy. A miracle. Fate. A few steps away yawned a shell crater made just a second ago, and around it corpses ripped to shreds. Ahead there was underbrush. I ran as well as I could. The brush closed around me and hid the hell I had just come through. The forest path was under fire. I ran across it without stopping. Behind me the trees were hit by a late burst of fire. I was just plain lucky. But how long was my luck going to last?

A deep, fast-flowing little stream was a real obstacle. Many were swept downstream. There were no crossings: the only thing that saved me was that I knew how to swim. I was not a good swimmer, but I was still able to pull with my healthy left arm, and I got to the edge of the ice at the opposite bank. For the first time that day I felt real fear. The current pulled my feet under the edge of the ice, but just before being pulled under, I was able to grab onto a willow branch the thickness of a pencil, which stuck out from the edge of the ice, and this saved my life. Very carefully, in order not to break the switch, I pulled myself higher until I could reach a thicker branch. I had made it.

A wind carrying drifting snow was sweeping across the fields. The weather got colder. Soon my clothes were like chainmail, which did not let the wind through but did hinder walking. My teeth were chattering, my leg muscles cramping up. I fell, I was helped to my feet, and there was nothing for it but to keep moving forward again, as fast as possible. The village was in sight. Between us and it shone the steely gray surface of another stream. Did we really have to swim again? It seemed not. There was a footbridge made of logs.

Unexpectedly a man turned toward me, barefoot, and clad in nothing but wet underwear: “Are you an Estonian?” I said, “Yes.” He

was clearly master of the situation. He was happy that what awaited him was a rest and a trip home.

In the village, together with some Germans whose clothes were quite dry, we entered a dilapidated house. The Germans fixed it up in makeshift fashion with bits of boards and some chaff. A fire was built in the stove. Soaked as I was, I was given the best place by the stove. My arm was bound with a dry bandage. So there were some humane Germans after all—but they were not officers, either. It felt quite pleasant to sit by the fire, breathing in the warm steam that arose from our clothing.

On the second morning we moved on. I stuffed dry straw into my felt boots and got on my way. A few hours later, walking in the powdery snow, the going got hard. More and more frequently the men sat down in the drifts. Most of them got up soon afterwards, but there were also those who did not get up. Completely weakened, they squatted in the snow, unable even to lift up their eyes. Night would come. By tomorrow the snow squalls would bury their stiffened bodies. God be with you, corpses of tomorrow! We were still walking. To the end? Who knows.

In the twilight the first ones reached a village. It was the last possible moment. I had not rested once. I knew how hard it would be to get up again. I had no strength to bend and lift my legs. By shifting my body from side to side I dragged my straight legs along the ground. Now I wasn't even thinking about resting. I understood that if I sat down I would never get up again. Some collapsed literally during the last few meters. A few hundred meters from the first houses I saw a German lying face down. His companion, who had no other way of helping him, tried to pull him up on his feet by pleading and threatening. Useless. The weak one barely managed to pull himself up on his arms, but could not get up. Crying from lack of strength, he fell down again.

There were "chain-dogs" (*ketikoerad*)¹³ standing on the road, who directed people to the food distribution points and to company assembling places. The food distribution point was a few hundred meters away, my unit three kilometers away. Since I was wounded I had no business in the unit assembly area, but I was no longer able to walk even the short distance to the food distribution point. With difficulty I staggered into the house where they were gathering the wounded. The more severely wounded were lying tightly packed next to each other on

¹³ German military police.

straw that had been scattered on the floor; those whose wounds were less serious were standing around in the smaller rooms. There was not enough room to sit down. Sandwiches were distributed. I got a few slices of bread spread with *ersatz* honey and margarine. I have never in my life tasted anything so good.

I was dead tired. More and more men came in, and we were so tightly packed together that if one were to fall asleep standing up, there would be no danger of falling.

The next morning I looked around in the house. Cracking open the door that opened onto the large veranda, I saw an irregularly shaped pile. In the semi-darkness I did not immediately understand that these were corpses, stacked up like firewood. This was war.

I jolted around in the back of a truck until Uman. I had become so apathetic that when the others took shelter in a ditch during an air raid, I stayed on in the bed of the truck. The bombs fell alongside me. Whether the machinegun fire aimed from the low flying airplane hit anyone or not, I do not know. In Uman I got on a train. In Lemberg (Lvov) there was a longer stop. There we went through "louse hell," where I was stripped of everything. I left the house of cleansing like a scarecrow.

On the way to Posen (Poznan), where I had been assigned for treatment, I was in high spirits. I had gotten out of a very dire situation with my life intact, and the cursed land of Ukraine fell further and further behind with every length of track.

In hospital I was in a room for three along with two German young men. They were great guys. I remember our nurse, a black-eyed beauty, everyone fell in love with her. While there I had a constant gnawing sense of hunger, and started having fits of sweating. Not because of that beauty. This was the result of my winter swimming exercises. Both my arm and my general health improved, and after one month in hospital I was given new clothes with SS-insignia, food ration cards, and a *Marschbefehl* to Ellwangen, where the recuperation camp was located. I had no idea where Ellwangen was. With great difficulty, I found my way there in the end. There followed two weeks of golden life. I saw the Allies air armada flying overhead, consisting of ten groups of fifty bombers. Seeing that titanic force it was not difficult to figure out on whose side were the fortunes of war.

My trip home went well, except for a few complications. I got to Tapa on 17 April. I had only been away 165 days, but a great deal

had fit into those days. I had made it through the siege that the Russians called the second Stalingrad; the Germans called it the Cherkasso cauldron,¹⁴ I had seen a beautiful Polish woman, who had eyes as black as night, and whose bewitching gaze I have never forgotten to this day.

In Tapa I got the last of my soldier's bread. Munching on it, I started walking toward Lehtse along the railway. It was springtime. For me the war was over, at least for now. Soon I would be home. My arm had healed. All was well.

Naturally I was welcomed home, but as was the custom of serious country people, there was no excessive emotion. In the meantime Helju had gotten married and given birth to a daughter, who by the time I got home had already died. Otherwise everything at home was as it had been in the fall. It was good that I could be of help to my father in the spring farm work.

After my wounding, I got a whole month's vacation, and it passed quickly. I had the plan that once I got home, I would not go back. The slaughter at Cherkasso/Korsun had taken away any last bit of lust for fighting. The course the war was taking also showed that if I went back in, there would be hardly a chance of returning. There were two alternatives left: either the grass would grow through my teeth at the edge of some hayfield, or I would be left wandering the earth. The first was out of the question, and the second not exactly tempting. I had made my decision: into the woods! All the more so when I called to mind that the Germans had beaten my ancestors. Among the horrendously punished Anija men¹⁵ there were fourteen of my relatives—men with the names Känd, Looberg, Kuuskmann, and now I was being asked to fight for the benefit of the descendants of baron Stackelberg? No way!

There were other men from my area living as forest brothers.¹⁶ We were not very actively pursued, and besides, our neighbor Anton warned us when there was a raid coming. There is another fine

¹⁴ Korsun-Cherkassy Pocket, see Glossary.

¹⁵ The Anija men: Punishment of the local representatives of the peasants of Anija parish in Harjumaa, who refused to do corvée labour, and approached the baron of their estate for an explanation of the peasant law. Without a trial, 51 men were brutally beaten on the market square in Tallinn on 21 July 1858. Eduard Vilde based the second novel of his historical trilogy, *Kui Anija mehed Tallinnas käisid* (When the Anija men went to Tallinn, 1903) on this episode.

¹⁶ Forest Brothers, see Glossary

story, which once again illustrates my relationship with Fate. I had always gone home from the side of the woods and entered by the door that opened toward the woods. One August evening when it was getting dark I came from the direction of the field and climbed into the house through the window. I heard from Mother that the edge of the woods was full of Germans who were watching for me. I grabbed a few mouthfuls and went back the way I had come, and slept like the men of old under a haystack.

When there was a group of us, we broke out in a game of *atskoo*¹⁷ for money. It would sometimes happen that we started on a Saturday night and ended on Monday morning. Once there was a little fight among us. The neighbor boy, Ants, held a grudge against Juss, my sister's husband, for stealing his girl. A quarrel broke out, as a result of which Juss' hand was shot through. After that happened, our group had had it with cards.

They started threatening my parents. I do not even remember what they promised they would do if the sons did not come out of the woods. We were promised amnesty, and we came out. The punishment was being sent to the front immediately. The Russians were already near Tartu, and that was where they sent us. By the way, there were Walloons there, whom I had had some contact with in Cherkas-so/Korsun.

That warm sunny day has stayed in my memory. We Estonians were sitting in machinegun dugouts on both sides of the railway. There was an exchange of fire going on where the Germans were, intensifying from time to time into the roar of battle. The Germans came and chased us out of our nice dugouts and took our places themselves. They sent us on where there was more fire. The trade had barely taken place when the Russians opened wildfire on both sides of the railway. The heavy fire threw the defensive line into turmoil. To top it all off, Russian tanks crawled out of the mist of battle. I fear that of the Germans who tried to put one over on us, not a single one survived. Was this Fate again?

The Russians had passed us on the other side as well, and so we had fallen behind the front lines. One of us was a local, and he directed us out of the little circle under cover of darkness. By dawn we were at the edge of the city. We turned our gun barrels in the direction we had come, and waited for developments.

¹⁷ Popular card game.

Our forces were weak. We retreated. We went through the woods to the banks of the river Emajõgi. Boats were few and far between, and there was haggling over them. I discovered a log raft, called some men to come closer, and, rowing with the ends of our guns, we were soon on the other side. Many who tried to swim across found a watery grave.

On the other side I met up with my uncle Arthur. We planned to start walking home, but German officers spoiled the plan. We sat in the trenches another day or two, and then one foggy morning, got on our way. Our trip home turned out to take six days, one of which was spent circling around in a bog.

And for me the war was over.

In war, I was both loser and winner. I lost my beloved, but I won, because my life was spared. With the help of an acquaintance, Raimond Kokk, I got a job and got my papers in order. I had a clean slate on my *anketa*,¹⁸ and there was no trip to Siberia.

A Bit More about the Hard Times

Our village, which was thoroughly poor, was left untouched by the deportations. Granted, our family was close to being affected, since chairman Joost of the township executive committee had a grudge against my father, and he did have an argument—a tractor and a threshing machine. Luckily there were also those who stood against Joost, and to cap it all off it was discovered that the machinery did not even belong to Father anymore. It had been taken away once, gotten back during the German times, and then Father had done something very clever and registered the machines under Erlich's name. By this time Erlich was a lieutenant in the Soviet Army, and a Party member besides. Of course the machines went off, but our trip to Siberia was cancelled. They forced Erlich to sell the machines for the price of two woolen blankets. That was something, anyway! Today he even laughs about it.

Another memorable event happened many years later, on 24 February 1988. My wife and I were in Tartu, both of us wearing tricolor

¹⁸ Official biographical summary in one's personnel file, see Glossary.

ribbons.¹⁹ We were attacked by KGB detectives in plainclothes. Like a dangerous criminal, my hands were wrenched behind my back and they tried to shove me into a car. My wife was asked to do the same of her own free will. We were able to resist, and because of the crowd that had gathered around us the detectives abandoned that idea, and I was carried off to the nearby militia station. My wife followed me on foot. After being put on the black list and under some pressure we were let go. We still had our tricolors. Oh, how I wanted to meet those men again, but things turned out differently. That time.

¹⁹ In 1988, in the context of perestroika, the movement variously called “the Singing Revolution” and the “second national awakening” was gathering strength. The Estonian blue-black-and-white colors (the “tricolor”) was being exhibited publicly, albeit cautiously at first.



Peep Vunder

BORN 1936

I was born the son of a constable on Sunday, 8 November 1936, at 18:45 in the district of Palmse. The time of my birth is recorded in my mother's little pocket calendar. I have tried to convince myself that being born on a Sunday means coming into the world under a lucky star. That is how I have explained to myself that I am the only one left of our family of seven. On 14 June 1941 our family was deported, and eleven

months later I was the only one left alive. My mother died of starvation on 30 January 1942 in the village of Medvedka in Tomsik *oblast*,¹ in a state of hopelessness, having tried to save the lives of her children at all costs. Two brothers had perished before my mother, a sister and a little brother after her. Having miraculously survived and returned to my homeland, for fifty years hence I have felt a responsibility to fight on behalf of all of those who remained behind in the "cold land."

Our family farm, Pällö, is one of the oldest at Võsu. My forefather Jakob Klaus was born in 1823 and was the skipper of the schooner that belonged to Palmse manor. He was among the first to purchase his own farm at Pällö in 1866. Miina Klaus-Wösso was born in 1833. Jakob and Miina began their life together at our family farm on St. George's Day 1867. Those were the days when Võsu began to flourish as a resort town, and the new farmhouse was rented out in the summers to vacationers from St. Petersburg. Jakob Klaus drowned in an accident in Tallinn harbor. His son, Hans Klaus, born in 1861, received a very good education for that time, and was elected township magistrate many times. According to his will, the farm was to be divided in

¹ Soviet administrative-territorial unit, see Glossary.

three parts between his widow and his two sisters. Since my great-uncle had no children, his widow went back to her own family farm, and my grandmother became the mistress of Pällö. My grandmother was born in 1864, and my grandfather, Jaan Veinman, in 1856. Along with my grandparents, their two daughters, my aunt Vanda (born 1904) and my mother Erika (born 1905), also found a new home. When Grandfather died in 1908, Grandmother was left alone with two little daughters and a farm to manage. My mother and aunt first attended the four-grade elementary school at Vösu, and after that the Rakvere Girls' High School.

My father, Voldemar Vunder, was born on 10 November 1904 in the township of Kareda in the county of Järvamaa. He graduated from the Paide Gymnasium, served in the armored railway regiment at Tapa, graduated from military school as an ensign (*lipnik*), and entered the upper division of the police academy. After finishing in the 6th graduating class of the police academy, he was appointed constable of the prefecture of Viru-Järva in the Palmse district. Grandmother had rented out an apartment to the police constable, and this was where my mother and father first met. Their wedding took place three years later, on 10 June 1932. The ceremony was held in Tallinn at the Church of the Holy Spirit. Father took up his new post as constable at Viru-Kabala. The first child, Ell, was born on 4 August 1933, to be followed on 11 December 1934 by my brother Enn, and myself as the third child. That same year, 1936, my father returned to Vösu as constable, and my life journey began at the family farm. A younger brother, Pearu, was born on 20 February 1939. My first four years at home were carefree. All of the farm work was on the shoulders of my grandmother, my aunt, and a farmhand, Ruudi. Mother, father, and the children lived in the new house, and the vacationers came in the summer. The sculptor Jaan Koort, the Extended Loan Bank president Paul Õpik, federal judge Martin Taevere, and many lawyers and judges from Rakvere and Tartu became good friends. One of the enduring memories from those early years is the death of my grandmother on 11 February 1941. I remember Grandmother in her coffin on the cold veranda and the funeral meal in our large family room. From the June 1940 takeover I remember the moment when there were two flags in front of our house at the veranda door, our blue-black-and-white one, and the new red one. In August 1940 Father was dismissed from his post as constable, and finally became an overseer (*kümnik*) in the

Sagadi forest district. Father's position was taken over by a local who did odd jobs named Arend Lilleberg, who had four years of schooling, and who spent a large part of the day practicing his signature in the margins of newspapers. The next year he was named political officer (*politruk*) of the Rakvere police (*milits*).²

Then came the fateful day, 14 June 1941, that destroyed our family. The deporters came suddenly, without warning. It was midmorning, and father had already gone to the loan association where he worked as a cashier. The table was set in the kitchen. The image of that table was before my eyes during all five of those years of starvation in faraway Siberia. The deporting officers were an NKVD captain, district party organizer Erich Leemets, executive committee chairman Gustav Licholm, an activist by the name of Veintrop from Väike-Maarja, and one soldier. I remember the open cabinet doors and drawers, where things had been taken out, and the Palmse district headquarters where we waited the whole long day with other families for the transport. When a large bus arrived to pick up the people, our family did not get on because all of us could not fit in. Towards evening a transport truck arrived, in the back of which our family and our possessions were put. Just before nightfall we arrived in Rakvere, and began boarding the cattle cars. In the evening sunlight I saw my father for the last time, a backpack on his back, walking toward the cars at the front of the train. All of the events that followed in the Siberian years of starvation and death I can recover by means of isolated memory-images, the stories of fate-companions (*saatusekaaslased*),³ and on the basis of many archival documents. I, one of the few survivors, need to preserve in memory the crime perpetrated by the communists, that struck the Estonian people on 14 June 1941.

I do not remember the sufferings that accompanied us during the long journey through Russia to Tomsk *oblast*. I do remember the long column of armed soldiers along the railroad in those few places where we were allowed to get out of the trains for a short while. The new surroundings, towns, and people were interesting to me. Why it all was happening made no sense to me. At my aunt's request I wrote down

² *Politruk*, see Glossary; the *milits* was the Soviet civilian police, as contrasted with the NKVD (the secret police).

³ Those who share one's fate; see Introduction for a more complete explanation of this concept.

the following account of my first trip as an 11-year-old "...but neither my brother nor I nor any one of us knew why soldiers had come with guns, and why we were being taken away to somewhere in Russia." We arrived in Novosibirsk on 1 July; there we were put on a large barge, where there were about 780–790 Estonians and 100 (?) Latvians. From that journey I remember the huge, broad Ob River. I cannot recollect the death of the first small children on our barge (on 7 July). On 10 July 1941, we arrived in Aipolovo, and there we were, drenched to the skin by a sudden thunderstorm, piled up on the riverbank together with all of our bundles. Everyone remembers that thunderstorm. Then I recall all three of us without our mother, lying on the floor in a room with everyone else. Mother was off somewhere else with our dying brother, two-year-old Pearu. Children kept dying one after another every day. Based on what I later found out, I now know that by 1 October 1941, 33 Estonian children had died in the Vasjugan district. When we were sitting there on the floor, a woman came to us, chatted with us, and gave my older sister some money to give to our mother. Thus Ell, who was to turn eight in a month, unexpectedly became the head of our family. To this day I do not know who that Estonian woman was, but her good deed is unforgettable. After the death of our brother Pearu, we traveled with other families up the Vasjugan River to our final destination. This was the village of Medvedka, one of the poorest in that area. In Medvedka we were struck by real famine. That spring there had been an enormous flood on the Ob River, and the potato fields of the local inhabitants yielded a scant harvest. I can remember a small one-room hut with a large Russian stove. When my older brother Enn, the thinnest among us, died, I cannot recall. I remember the constant shortage of food, and that my mother would go out to trade some of our things in return for food. After that we would get something to eat. One time she got a handful of flour, and cooked something biscuit-like in a pan.

I remember our second dwelling-place in that village. That one was bigger, and through a fog I can recollect the members of the family. There my mother died on 30 January 1942, having given birth to yet a fifth child, my little brother Jaak-Andres. My brother was born on 12 December 1941. I have always remembered the last evening of my mother's life. The other Estonians in the village were visiting, and were sitting with my mother at the table. The next day I did not have a mother anymore... From my companions I learned that she

had apparently faded away in her sleep, my little brother at her breast. When my mother's body grew cold, the one-and-a-half month old child raised an alarm. I remember my sister sleeping next to me on the floor, and that my little brother lay there for some time in a kind of box hanging from the ceiling. Ell died the morning of 4 April 1942. She woke up, sat up, sighed deeply, and sank down again next to me. And that was the end of her life. I was left alone with my little brother. It is hard to understand how that little human being kept going for another two months. He died on 20 May 1942. From that day onward I was alone. For decades I longed to be reunited with my imprisoned father, who slipped away into oblivion for the next half century.

Father perished in December 1941 in the Stupino camp, department 8. I did not discover that until 1990, because the Soviet regime concealed the fate of those who were executed or who perished from their relatives. In Tartu I met a person who witnessed the death of my father. Karl Parveots, one of Father's colleagues from Rakvere, is among the few Estonian men to survive from among the 750 who arrived at the Sosva death camp on 3 July 1941. From what he told me, I know that I will never learn the exact date of my father's death, since the official document does not correspond to reality. But it must have happened after the 17th of December and before the New Year. Kaarel Parveots was in the room where they carried my father, who had collapsed in the forest. He died that same night.

I was saved from death by starvation by the coming of spring, and apparently by a miracle. When the ice broke and river transport resumed, orphans such as myself were gathered up from the famine villages and sent by barge to the Aipolovo orphanage. We arrived there on 22 June 1942, as it is recorded in the registry book. I have blurry memories of the hot summer and the dusty village roads at Aipolovo. I recall an incident in which two bigger local boys beat me up and stole my only piece of candy or sugar, which I was holding tightly in my fist. From Aipolovo I was sent along with a few preschool-aged Estonian children to the Togur home for small children. From that journey I remember a little light-haired girl like myself, we tried to create a united front against our tormentors by pretending we were brother and sister. Now I know that her name is Helgi Nurk. Later she would travel back to Estonia with me.

After the arrival in Togur there is a huge gap in my memory, which can be explained by famine, which consumes brain cells. I became ill

with the “bloody intestinal sickness,” which took the lives of many people. I remember a moment when I opened my eyes, and saw the room where I lay, and someone in a white uniform. I was in the quarantine room of the Togur children’s home, and a nurse was bustling about. After my recovery in late autumn or winter 1943 I went back to join the other children.

From a later period I recall a moment when I tried to converse in Estonian with one of them, but not a word would come out of my mouth. I had forgotten my mother tongue, and I had dissolved into a multinational community. The use of our mother tongues was prohibited. Orphans in children’s homes were being raised as Soviet citizens, and many of them later became workers in the security apparatus (like the Estonian SSR KGB chief Vladimir Pool). The main pleasures of boys in the children’s home were war games played between “our boys” and the fascists, or the “reds” and the “whites.” No one voluntarily wanted to play on the side of the so-called enemy, and often the weaker ones were assigned that role. The typical form of battle was throwing stones, and I remember the bleeding head wounds. The weak ones bore the brunt of everyone’s beatings. I remember very well the day when my patience reached its limit. I fought the next attacker off and beat him to a pulp, pouring all my pent-up rage out on him. There were only a few more of such incidents, and the number of tormentors shrank almost to nothing. I had won myself a secure position among the top ten, and later I would consider the Russian boy Volodya and an Armenian named Rozlik Assojan to be my best friends. As the leaders they had nothing to prove to anyone. The position I had achieved satisfied me, because I had no interest in picking fights with the weaker ones. My interests lay elsewhere.

One of the counselors taught me the alphabet, and by sounding out newspaper headlines I had my first taste of the joys of reading. In the fall of 1944 I entered the first grade. In the fall we went to the large school at Togur, where there was a separate class for orphanage children; later in the winter we studied in our own building, probably in the office. I was a good student, because I was curious and motivated. We were given no report cards. Only upon leaving the orphanage was I given a so-called certificate for having completed the second grade; it was written on a sheet of notebook paper, and the marks were all “fives.”

The orphanage saved me and other Estonian children from certain death by starvation. I remember the scant evening meals consisting of

a few unpeeled boiled potatoes, a tiny morsel of fish, and a glass of tea. One time I filled my belly with mushroom soup, since we had gathered a good harvest in the woods. The lack of food was a constant torture, and the orphanage children always walked around with their heads down, looking around for something fit to eat: a frozen potato, blades of grass, or pine shoots.

In the orphanage we were shaped into dedicated soldiers of the communist regime. We passionately cheered for Red Army victories, and thought of ourselves as the children of soldiers fighting on the front lines, hoping to be reunited with our fathers after the victorious end of the war. I remember the great enthusiasm that fell upon the orphanage on the morning of the 9th of May, 1945, when the counselor ran from the office into our bedroom with the news that the war had ended.

The end of the war meant an increase in correspondence. I was like everyone else at first, rushing to the counselor at mail call. But I never received any letters, and gradually realized that of course there was no one who would possibly write to me. When the letters were distributed, I would withdraw from the others into a corner, and keep to myself. And then a miracle happened. I was standing apart from the others, and did not even notice that one letter was called several times, and no one claimed it. Finally the counselor had to call out to me, asking me whether I really did not want my letter. This was a complete surprise, it opened a door back into the world where I had once belonged. It was May, 1946, and I was completing the second grade. The letter was from my mother's sister, Aunt Vanda, who had been searching for me for a year and a half. A close acquaintance had informed her that all of Erika's children had died, but that one boy was supposedly in an orphanage. That day she began her correspondence with the *oblast* authorities in Tomsk, Novosibirsk, and Sverdlovsk. Each time she got a negative response, Mrs. Kers gave her instructions by mail from Siberia about where to turn next. On top of everything else, my name had been changed to Tispus, according to Russian custom. My aunt wrote that I had a home, and that there was a horse named Mai who was being raised for me. That day marked the beginning of my long and difficult return journey to Estonian society. I responded to my aunt's letter, and reported on the deaths of all of my relatives, of which I had only blurry memories even then.

The return of the Estonian orphans in 1946–1948 became possible due to official permission granted by the NKVD for “temporary

rearing” of children by their relatives in Estonia. In August 1946 three children traveled from Togur back to Estonia: seven-year old Vaike-Marie from Narva, ten-year old Helgi from Viru-Maidla, and myself. Later we found out that Vaike’s mother had been arrested in Siberia in the summer of 1942, and sentenced to three years of forced labor because she had brought a few handfuls of grain home to her starving child. The placement of the child in the orphanage saved her life. Many mothers took such desperate measures.

During the return journey to Estonia, there was a longer stop in a schoolhouse in Tomsk. A three-member team that had arrived from Tallinn registered us, organized our return journey, and two of them accompanied us at the end of August when we left Tomsk in a long echelon. One good person from Tallinn remained behind to organize new transports of Estonian children. We rode home in a long echelon of cattle cars, where there were many children of evacuees with different destinations: Moscow, Leningrad, Riga, etc. There were about 26–30 children in our car. One of the people accompanying us was the aunt of two little girls, she had traveled to Russia to pick up the children without knowing a word of Russian herself. The three of us from Togur were the youngest, and the only ones who did not know their mother tongue. Enviously I listened to the Estonian-language conversations, and one day I remembered one Estonian word—*juust* (cheese). During that journey that was all I was capable of.

Our return journey took about two weeks, and in the end we ran out of food. At Tapa the train halted near a market, and when the women found out who we were, several of them came to offer us food. We arrived in Tallinn on 6 September 1946. In complete darkness we rode through the city in ruins to the Kreuks Street homeless children’s shelter, which to us seemed a very luxurious place to live. Officially that institution was named the Tallinn Reception and Distribution Center of Underage Children. Immediately we were taken to the sauna, where we received special soap to get rid of lice. We got three meals a day, with three different kinds of food at each meal. The food was tasty and the helpings generous. For the first time after five years in Siberia we had no worries about food.

All of us looked forward to going home with lively interest. No one was turned over to relatives without a thorough inspection. When my aunt’s friend came for me from Võsu, she was presented with a line-up of five boys, and she had to pick me out from among them. Those first

days back in Estonia are clearly etched in my memory, for everything was so new: people were well dressed, polite, and spoke in quiet voices; everything was clean and in order. With aunt Siina I rode a streetcar for the first time and saw the city. My Aunt Vanda arrived a few days later, paid the expenses for my return from Siberia (660 roubles), and received a document certifying that she had agreed to take me into her home temporarily to raise me. A set of clothing was issued from the shelter's supply. My aunt and I went to the Tallinn suburb of Nõmme, and the next day she took me to the doctor. That same day we rode from Tallinn to Nõmme in the back of a truck. It was dusk when we arrived, on Friday, 13 September 1946. Upon arriving in the yard of my home, many things suddenly began to come back to me. I ran around, exploring every corner of our big farmyard, as well as all the rooms of the house, and started to ply my aunt with questions about why many things were no longer where they used to be. My questions dispelled my aunt's doubts; she had found it very hard to believe that this little Russian boy was from this house. I sat down at my father's writing desk, where there were framed photos of my father and mother and all of the children, and I saw them in front of me after those long years in Siberia as if they were alive. Then I finally burst into tears, shocking even myself by it, and all the toughness I had brought along with me from the orphanage disappeared. My aunt told me that the same evening, when I sat down to eat with her for the first time, I had asked whether there would also be something to eat tomorrow. My aunt was so shaken by my question that she would never forget it.

I began the difficult process of adjusting to a new life. Before everything else I had to relearn Estonian in order to go to school. This took me until January. Every evening after a hard day's farm work my aunt sat down with me at the kitchen table, and I studied my mother tongue all over again. The main obstacle was pronunciation. On 20 January 1947 I went to the Võsu school, and upon my aunt's fervent pleading was placed into the second grade. I knew a large number of Estonian words, but was a long way from being able to carry on a normal conversation. In school, I quickly realized that the only way to get satisfactory marks was to copy from my neighbor. By spring I had mastered Estonian, and at the age of ten finished the second grade with more-or-less acceptable marks. My tenth birthday, half a year earlier, was a day of surprises. Coming from the orphanage, I had no idea that customs existed for marking such an occasion. In our awareness

birthdays did not exist. When at the end of November my aunt called me into the living room and showed me a table laden with all sorts of things and books, I was completely shocked, and could not believe that all of this was for me. In the middle of the table was a *kringel* baked by my aunt.⁴ One present was a handsome suit with knickers, and there were many books in Russian. Tädi Siina from Tallinn had sent a book and a letter wishing me well in learning my mother tongue.

During my first days back in Estonia, I tried to teach my aunt how to live progressively, based on what I had been taught in Russia. She did not argue with me, but gently directed me to different ways of looking at life. Later she told me that I had tried to explain to her how potatoes should be planted using a shovel, and that religion was intended to fool stupid people, using examples from Russia as proof for my arguments. My aunt, a single woman, coped with everything, and work literally flew under her hands. She planted, plowed, hauled everything necessary using horses, made hay and harvested rye. As a little upstart of a fellow, I helped bale the rye and carry the shocks of grain. My aunt taught me how to handle horses. With my “Siberian temperament” I made old Inta to break into a gallop without reason, and for that I got scolded. During seasonal work, like harvesting potatoes or threshing, additional helpers were needed; those enjoyable workdays ended around a common table where interesting stories were told. My aunt cooked for the helpers, giving them food to bring out to the fields and an evening meal at home. I helped peel potatoes, and to this day I remember the farm’s recipe for mashed potatoes.

Those two first years after returning from Siberia were the happiest. We had everything we needed; there were good prices for our produce, and my aunt earned enough money to pay the taxes and all the other necessities. She had three horses, two or three cows, pigs, lambs, and chickens; since the summer of 1941 she had managed the farm on her own. She had raised a fine stallion, who was a loyal helper, her pride and joy. A year-and-a-half-old foal named Mai was being raised for me. My aunt wanted to raise me to be a real farmer, master of the house, and taught me to call myself, “master of Pällo.”

⁴ *Kringel*, white bread seasoned with cardamom and saffron, baked on birthdays and holidays. On birthdays, it is often shaped into a large pretzel. (See also Tuuli Jaik’s life story.)

I developed regular study habits. In our home all the books had survived, even those my grandparents had bought. I made use of this extensive home library constantly, and always carried a book with me while herding the animals. In the third grade I discovered the Võsu village hall library. In the summer of 1948 all children's books from the Independence Era had been removed from the school library: the Soviet regime destroyed the books. As far as the the local communists were concerned, we were a family of bandits, and my aunt had to take on additional duties without protest, and at short notice, any time the regional party committee director assigned them. She had to house and feed party activists (agitators), police officers (*miilits*), KGB men, delegates, auditors sent to the district on official assignments. On some evenings, unexpected orders would come to harness the horse and drive an official to the neighboring village. When my aunt dared to object, as she sometimes did, she would be reminded, "Have you forgotten where your sister's husband is?"

At the end of 1948 my aunt was classified as a *kulak*,⁵ an "oppressor of the working class." She had fulfilled all of her duties to the letter and paid her taxes, but this did not count. We had been placed on the list of those to be forcibly resettled in perpetuity on 25 March 1949. By some miracle, our saviour turned out to be Minister of Justice, A. Jõeäär, who had been put up in our house for a week in February, along with his driver. The minister had been carrying out "educational work" in the area, probably regarding the formation of collective farms. He became the first example I had seen of a humane representative of the Soviet regime. Having learned of the "kulak" title given to the mistress of the house, Jõeäär demanded that the local party executive committee erase my aunt's name from the list. As a souvenir, he left behind his little book containing the precise definition of a *kulak* as an enemy of the people. On the day he left the minister paid for his food and lodging, upon which the mistress of the house burst out in surprised laughter; that was when she discovered that all officials have special funds to pay for their living expenses.

On the eve of 25 March, 1949, all of the farm owners were summoned to a meeting in the local village hall. The high official they were waiting for never came, and the meeting was not held, but the men were kept until a late hour. The next morning the rumble of trucks

⁵ *Kulak*, "wealthy farmer," see Glossary.

filled the village and lasted for several days. I immediately recalled the famine in Siberia, with death all around, all of those things I had already begun to forget, though horrible things remained hidden in my unconscious and erupted in my dreams.

After the farm folk had been taken away to Siberia, *kolkhozes*⁶ were formed, “voluntarily by force,” as the people would say. My aunt did not join the *kolkhoz*, and remained an independent farmer, even though her taxes were doubled. She still believed the document entitled “Deed Granting Perpetual use of the Land,” which had been ceremoniously bestowed upon her by the “power of the working people” a few years earlier. During the next two years heavy farm work was done from morning until night.

A year after that all of the taxes were raised to the point that my aunt had no choice but to sell one horse, a cow, and many other things as well. But despite this she was not able to meet a payment deadline, and one autumn evening after the end of the schoolday during the mixed grain harvest, the tax inspector came out to the field. My aunt’s possessions were written up, and a very short deadline given for payment. In case of nonpayment, all of her household goods were to be sold for the paltry sum stated in the document. After the inspector left, my aunt sat at the table for a long time. Her large working-woman’s hands were motionless on the table, and I was afraid that the spirit of life would leave her, for she had already collapsed once. My aunt had kept all of her tax documents: for 1947, 163.50 roubles, for 1948, 485.85 roubles, for 1949, 1,075.77 roubles, and 1950, 4,549.30 roubles. With great effort we managed to get through that year. Then came the final inventory, what number it was, I no longer remember: two horses, a cow, a pig, a sheep with three lambs, and my departed mother’s Singer sewing machine. The document concluded with a note: no additional goods. If that paper had been submitted, my tax debtor of an aunt would have been sentenced to two years of prison, followed by forcible resettlement to Siberia for life. That last document carried the date 18 April 1951. After that, my aunt finally “voluntarily” joined the *kolkhoz*, and strange as it may seem, no one demanded that she pay off her tax debt. My aunt’s most prized possessions—Jaalo, the fiery stallion, and Mai, the gentle mare, were taken to the *kolkhoz* stable. They would never enjoy my aunt’s tender care again.

⁶ *Kolkhoz*, collective farm, see Glossary.

In the *kolkhoz*, which bore the name “The Right Path,” my aunt continued to work like a man as she had done before; there was only one man in the brigade. This was typical of Estonian villages after the war. I clearly remember the first day of team labor on the Pällu fields: my aunt and the other women were plowing with horses, but in the middle of the field, straight as a pin, stood the brigadier, Aleksander Raudsik. That communist fellow had come to Võsu with the June 1940 coup, and distinguished himself by drunkenness and taking over the property of the arrested. Toward autumn the vodka bottle appeared in the fields. For my aunt, who was a teetotaler, this was beyond belief. By the end of the fall work season my aunt had accumulated the largest number of workday quotas⁷ of all of the women, and drove with horse and wagon to the centre at Käsmu to collect her annual wages in grain. She tossed a few empty sacks into the wagon, thought it over a bit, and then added one more. Upon returning home, with one hand she took out of the wagon a single bag, that seemed to have something in it, threw it into the grain-drying barn, and went about her household tasks in silence. In the new year she got a postal order for a few roubles, listing the average daily wages as approximately 7 kopecks! Poverty entered the house. The only food came from the single cow allotted to each *kolkhoz* member, and the potatoes and vegetables from the “soul’s acre.” The bread-kneading bowl had disappeared from the house, and even bread had to be bought in the store with money that did not exist.

My studies in school were not particularly difficult for me. Beginning in the fourth grade I started to receive letters of commendation each year. In the spring of 1952 I finished the seventh grade, and graduated from the Võsu school, having taken ten examinations. As an award for successful graduation from school, my teacher gave me a valuable gift, a “Ljubitel” camera. We joined our teachers for a festive graduation meal of foods prepared together in the school kitchen and cake.

That summer I went to work in the cooperative store as a stockboy, and earned a little extra money to continue my studies. On 1 September 1952 I enrolled in the Rakvere Estonian High School; the certificate provided by the village soviet gave me official permission to move

⁷ A workday (*normipäev*) was determined by whether or not one met that day’s production quota.

to another district. In this school there were students from all over the county. Paying for my tuition and lodgings in Rakvere, and providing wood in wintertime was a real hardship for my aunt. Tuition payments were not abolished until a few years later. Every month she had to pay the school 50 roubles for midday meals at the school cafeteria.

The fall of 1952 began in the *kolkhoz* doing seasonal farm work, which gave me a good opportunity to get to know my classmates. We lived in farmhouses left empty after the 1949 deportations, and found the former owners' names written on the walls. It was a rainy autumn, and the work progressed slowly. Although we went back to school at the beginning of October, at the end of the month we were sent back to the *kolkhoz* for a week. While studying in Rakvere I went home seldom; once even a whole quarter went by without a single visit. There was no money for the bus, and during the winter the roads were impassable because of the snow. When I did go home, I rode in the back of a truck. I did not go to the theatre or the cinema, either. No matter how much I wanted to, there simply was not enough money. Every evening I would sit in the reading room of the town library and read through all the newspapers and magazines, and anything else to be had. I remember well my second reading of *War and Peace*, I discovered many new things in that novel. I took part in all of the school's athletic competitions beginning with track and field, chess and draughts (*kabe*), including skiing in winter. In the summers I would work in the rest home⁸ as caretaker of the tennis courts, and my wages were 260 roubles a month. I saved up money for the winter and learned to play tennis. Of course, I helped my aunt with the haying and other work. My four high school years soon passed. The last summer before my graduation, the hot summer of 1955, I worked as a ditch digger in the state forest. Heavy physical work brought in much higher wages: that winter I was able to purchase my first suit. Up till then I had worn my father's or uncles' old clothes, or shirts my aunt sewed together from many small pieces of leftover cloth.⁹

The year 1956 was a turning point in many ways, both for me and for the people as a whole. Public discussion began about Stalin's crimes, and Estonian men began returning from the Siberian prison

⁸ Rest home (*dom otdikha*)—vacation resort for working people.

⁹ See also the life stories of Selma Tasane, Jutta Pihlamägi, and Asta Luksepp for makeshift clothing in postwar Estonia.

camps. In the spring Ruudi, our farmhand from the Estonian era, came back from Vorkuta. My aunt had considered Ruudi to be one of the family, and had sent him food packages to Vorkuta, just as thousands of Estonian women had done. She was prepared to offer Ruudi lodging in our house, but Võsu was in a restricted border zone, where passports had to be furnished with a special stamp.

My last year of high school was a memorable time. There was only one Young Communist¹⁰ in our class, the son of a policeman who had perished in the war, but attitudes toward him were tolerant. In 1953 attempts were made to lure our whole class to join the Komsomol, but the “enlightenment” did not bear fruit. The head teacher and the school administration kept us in after school for a long evening. Efforts were made to convince me that as a good student, I should be thinking about university, which was open only to Komsomol members. I have beautiful memories of the period of final examinations that spring. All of the girls looked lovely in their summer dresses, my examinations went well, and I strove for first place on the oral examinations. During my four years of high school my aunt only came to Rakvere twice: the first time to find me lodgings, and the second time for my graduation. In the auditorium she met some of her high school classmates, whose children were graduating with me. I graduated with a gold medal, and was the first in the auditorium to receive my diploma. The most meaningful part of the occasion was my aunt’s held-back tears, and her words, “If only your mother had lived to see this!” Our graduation party lasted until morning, and was alcohol-free.

In the fall, without taking any entrance examinations, I enrolled in the mechanics department of Tallinn Polytechnic University, specializing in thermal energetics. I had made that decision in the winter. I knew that my real interests lay in the humanities, but that year there were no students admitted to Tartu University in geology or archaeology. I would gladly have studied history, but I realized that the Soviet regime would stand in my way. Luckily, I got a dormitory spot, and the rent was cheap. My stipend was 295 roubles a month, my only means to continue my education. The dormitory was located on Toompea, at number 4 Kohtu Street, in the building that formerly housed the Finnish Embassy. I was in a middle room, with doors on each end,

¹⁰ Member of the Komsomol, the Communist Youth Organization, see Glossary.

with a balcony looking out on Pikk Jalg.¹¹ There were eight boys in the room, and the twelve to fourteen boys in the neighboring room walked through, as well as the six Russian boatbuilders who lived in the smaller one. The academic year began on 1 September 1956 with an opening ceremony. We were given three days vacation to go home, pick up our things, and go to Läänemaa for a month of *kolkhoz* work. We worked hard, and in the evenings attended parties in the village halls. The return trip began with a demonstration in Lihula, and continued with a skit presented by the university students, the mock funeral of a ragdoll named Joosep Toots.¹² The vigilant officers of the military studies department, who were along to supervise, interpreted the skit as “politically motivated.” A half year later the department chair Soonvald and vice-dean Öpik were dismissed from their positions. Along with them I was dismissed from my duties as group leader, and that was fine with me.

The scholarship I was counting on was not paid out at the beginning of the year, and I found myself in financial trouble. I was forced to look up an acquaintance from among my aunt’s summer lodgers, who worked at a hairdresser’s. I remember how embarrassingly difficult this was, and that was to be the last time I would ask for such help. I think we finally got two months worth of stipend in the middle of October. As group leader I took out the money and distributed it in return for signatures. The scholarship allowed one a modest living. The lectures were interesting, and I took careful notes, but in the dormitory it was impossible to find a quiet corner or a quiet moment for daily study. I discovered the library that was located next door in the former Ritter-schaft building, and started going there to study. The first examination was a learning experience. Feeling that I had not been able to work my way through the material with my customary thoroughness, I studied all night. At the examination my head was suddenly empty, and I had to content myself with passing. Luckily I did not lose my scholarship.

The Hungarian uprising was the unforgettable event of 1956. Disregarding inspections of every kind, we persisted in listening to foreign radio broadcasts in the dormitory, and empathized unanimously

¹¹ Pikk Jalg, one of the streets leading from the Old City of Tallinn to Toompea Hill.

¹² Joosep Toots is the prankster character in Oskar Luts’ classic school novel *Kevade* (Spring).

with the Hungarian people. Of course, in every room and study group there were informers to the KGB, and several Russian students from the room next door had to undergo interrogations. I do not remember whether anyone was expelled from the institute, but in autumn of that same year there was a tense meeting in the seventh auditorium, which was packed with people. A few students from the upper divisions were expelled among them one of my Rakvere schoolmates.

Cooking in the dormitory was complicated. There was a large kitchen on the ground floor, where one could prepare one's own food on a gas stove. In the second floor hallway there were food cabinets, where one could keep potatoes and vegetables, butter, bacon, and bread from home. Two meals a day were guaranteed from these home provisions: morning tea and a solid warm evening meal. I celebrated my twentieth birthday at home with my aunt. The Soviet regime's October holiday granted me an annual day off on my birthday. My aunt gave me a wristwatch, the first one I had ever owned. The watch cost 340 roubles, an expensive item I did not want to accept. I wanted to get by on my stipend. My aunt convinced me one cannot do without a watch. That watch lasted me 25 years.

The spring semester examinations ended with St. John's Day (24 June), and once again we assembled in the seventh auditorium to submit our agreement to the Komsomol for a vacation "travel voucher" (*tuusik*) to work on the "virgin lands." More than half of us were not members of the Komsomol, since it was not compulsory at the time of matriculation. But whoever wanted to keep their scholarship had to travel to Kazakhstan. We left Tallinn in cattle cars on the 20th of July. In the early morning, as I left for the bus at Võsu, my aunt saw me off as always, but fear of faraway Russia was written all over her face. We traveled to the "virgin land" in the hot summer of 1957. On the way to Asia we kept passing trainloads of foreigners on their way to Moscow to the international youth festival. Because of the heat we were half-naked, wearing swimsuits, and we waved to them, shouting the popular phrase, *Hindi, rusi, bai, bai!*¹³ This was the second time I had crossed the Urals on the way east.

I had an accident at the European-Asian border. I was playing volleyball while the train made a stop. I stepped on a broken bottle, and

¹³ Indians, Russians, brothers, brothers! (This slogan was shouted by Nikita Khrushchev during his visit to Calcutta in December, 1955.)

got a deep wound in the sole of my foot that bled heavily. I could not get back into the train on my own. The boys carried me to the so-called hospital car, where the medical worker bandaged my foot and applied a tourniquet to my thigh to stop the bleeding. My condition worsened, and at Sverdlovsk station I was taken by ambulance to the hospital. On the operating table, a few stitches were put in, and I was quickly driven back to the station. The train pulled out immediately, and I was placed into the first available car, which turned out to be full of a pleasant group of university students from Tartu. My fever rose, and I was again put down at Kartalõ station, where I spent a week in hospital with two other students. Most of the students got the flu while in the “virgin lands.” After my fever went down, I was discharged. On crutches, hopping on one foot, my backpack on my back, I hobbled to the railway station and waved my Komsomol papers in front of the ticket agent to get onto the next train. At our destination in Kustanai, I had quite a time finding a truck that was going to the Viktorovka *sovhoz* to join my team. On arrival, most of the 50 students were ill with diarrhea. I got around slowly on my crutches, and, limping, started shoveling grain. The others began with haying, and later on came the harvest. The upper division boys were assigned to the combine, and lived out on the steppe. It was a poor harvest due to the drought. Thirty hectares yielded only a small roomful of grain, just as in the popular Russian couplet, “Kolya, the proletariat hero, gathered a *pood* of grain per hectare.”

One of the hardest jobs was loading the freight cars, an all-night job, which we did in pairs, trading shifts. The work lasted until the beginning of October. On 4 October 1957 we left, in a passenger train this time. On our way we were informed of the first Sputnik space flight. On the way back we had money, so we could spend a bit more on ourselves. The cost of food had been deducted from our pay, so my total wages were about 600 roubles. We stopped in Moscow for two to three days, and got to see the national economic fair and do some sightseeing. Our second year of study began in a new place of residence, a large housing complex on People’s Justice Street just above the Patkul steps. At first there were seven to eight boys in the room; and starting in the third year we were given rooms for four or five. After finishing my second year, I signed up to work in the “virgin lands” again, since the commission refused to approve my scholarship otherwise. I depended so much on that stipend, that I did not dare to take

a risk. In the autumn it turned out that some were able to get their scholarships more easily, by spending a month working in the *kolkhozes* in August and September. In our second year the boys in our class formed a construction brigade, and were given a great deal of freedom to plan our own work. We left the harvesting to the first year students. Kazakhstan was a good “education for life” (*elukool*) in every sense. On the way home we again spent a few days in Moscow.

The third year was more interesting, with more specialized courses. Evening lectures were tiring. After the spring of 1959 examinations we were sent to our first practicum at the Baltic Electricity Power Station which was still under construction, and where we worked for two months as locksmiths. We fitted pipes for the first cauldron and turbine, and became more closely acquainted with the Russian proletariat. We lived in converted railway cars; on our days off we sunbathed at Narva-Jõesuu, and went dancing in the evenings with the Tartu students at Pimeaed and Parusinka. We probably had about three weeks of school vacation in August. By then, all that remained of my aunt’s household was 0.6 hectares of land and one cow. The everyday *kolkhoz* work brought nothing extra in, just as it had been before. In the summers she got a little extra money from vacationers.

In June, after my fourth year, I went to my first military camp in East Prussia. Dressed as the Russian soldiers we were, we were put through drills, and lived in old Prussian garrisons. With our Estonian-language marching commands and student songs we were free to march through town however we wished. One Saturday on our way home from the sauna, a general stopped our commanding major and praised our column. In August we were free, and in September began our practicum in Narva, where the electric station was now already functioning. We took part in the testing of turbines, and earned the extra money so important for a university student. Before Christmas there were final examinations, followed by a gathering at the “Old Thomas” cafe. At the beginning of January we left for our last practicum in Riga. We were issued new paper money, as the currency reform had taken effect as of 1 January 1961.

The topic of my thesis was a project for the steam boiler for a 200 MW energy block that operated on oil shale heating. We traveled to Taganrog boiler factory for an introductory practicum. In the offices of the huge factory I saw variations on the kind of boiler that interested me. The Estonian student’s cap came in handy for the privilege

of spending the night in the international hall of the Kharkov railway station; in our broken Russian we announced we were from Viljandi. The calculations required for the thesis turned out to be extensive. By the beginning of June I had passed through the preliminary defense in the department and presented to the reviewer. The defense, which took place on 22 June in the "Estonian Energy" auditorium, went very well and I was given a very good mark. On that day we became engineers and colleagues, as it was ceremoniously announced by our professors at the Piritä restaurant.

After the defense I sent my aunt a telegram, and got a very nice letter in return. She had done everything she could, sacrificing herself so that I could get the best possible education. She had been like a mother to me, but I had the feeling that in domestic work I had not met her strict standards.

In high school, I had experienced my first love. Everything happened very suddenly, all the more so since I had not noticed this girl before. The lovely spring of 1955, and a hot summer full of longing ended as such things usually do, in the late autumn. It was a difficult experience, and undermined my self-confidence. After my first year of university, while working on the virgin lands, a new love blossomed. Again it was a classmate, whom I had not known enough to notice during the winter. By the fall of my second year, I realized I was hopelessly in love, even though I tried to deny my feelings. That secret love lasted for my four ensuing years of university. I did not dare undertake anything decisive, and we did not clarify things until after I defended my thesis. The month of vacation went by working at home, but my aunt could not fail to notice the change in my demeanor after the loss of my love. While we were making hay in the fields, she tried to talk to me about it, but I held her at bay saying there was nothing the matter. I had grown to be exactly like my aunt.

At the end of July I was off to Riga to military camp. Our base was near Riga on the banks of the Kiz River. We slept in tents. The most unpleasant part of the summer was the barbaric work we had to do at night in the old Jewish cemetery near Riga. Under floodlights we had to use a pressure hammer to break up gravestones. Luckily, the driver and I were assigned to something different. This was the time they were putting up the Berlin Wall, and toward the end of August we could feel tension among the ranks. A theme of our soldier's humor became the possibility of a trip West, "nach Berlin."

We arrived in Tallinn on 31 August, and a few days later signed for our engineer's diplomas and received our packet of transition money.¹⁴ Our student life in Tallinn was drawing to a close, and we faced the employment commission. It was 8 September 1961. Our goal was to serve the three required years in Narva, and then to return to Tallinn as experienced specialists. According to our papers, we were entitled to an engineer's job, wages of 120–130 roubles a month, and a place in dormitory housing for engineers and technical personnel.

But other things were in store for us in Narva. We were placed four to a room in the dormitory, with wages of 105 roubles and assigned to be cauldron mechanics. We raised a protest about the housing and the pay, but the up-to-date installations in Narva were very interesting, and we did not try to switch jobs. Besides, in the cadres department I realized that I was a "marked man," whose personnel record was on file in the "special department."¹⁵ In reality, we became apprentices, and all went to work on different shifts. I started from zero in the true sense of the word, and seven years later had worked myself up to the post of reserve engineer for the main division, which was tantamount to director of operations. I became used to a lifestyle of working night shifts, Sundays, holidays and New Year's Eve. All in all, I worked at the Baltic Thermal Electric Station for 16 years. As shift foreman I was also on duty during the largest fire, which was caused by carelessness, and resulted in a stoppage of 90% of the energy giant's capacity.

Every year new specialists arrived in Narva from institutions of higher learning. In that predominantly Russian-speaking city, we became a little society unto ourselves. In 1963 we finally got so-called engineers' rooms in a hotel-type dormitory: these were 9 square meters large, with a WC and sink. Three of us engineers shared two rooms separated by a door. During the first autumn we pooled our money and bought a wardrobe cabinet, and that piece of furniture bound us together for many years. Our "innocent" leisure-time activities did not go unnoticed by the Narva Party Committee. Our song repertoire, literary

¹⁴ Upon completing university, students were assigned to their first three-year job by an employment commission. A sum of money was paid to university graduates for the transition until the first paycheck.

¹⁵ Vunder is referring to the official biographical form, the *anketa*, which included mandatory facts about one's personal past, in Vunder's case, his deportation to Siberia as a child. See Glossary.

evenings and other such events had a nationalist character to them. An informer happened to join our group, and about a year later they began to interrogate us one by one. They talked to me right there at the workplace, on the shift, in the presence of the political officer (*politruk*). It all culminated in a conversation in the office of Pushkin, the secretary of the Narva Party Committee, in the presence of comrade Ranne, department secretary of the Central Committee, who had arrived from Tallinn. The Party Committee informed us that there were still plenty of illiterate people in Narva whom we should have been educating in our spare time, instead of isolating ourselves in a suspicious manner and forming our own circle. We got away with only a reprimand, but even this was merely symbolic, since there were no Party members among us.

For my first two years in Narva, I was still in the clutches of my old love. In August 1963 a young woman who had just graduated from Tallinn Polytechnic Institute arrived to become the engineer of the automated department. We first became acquainted at work. I think I asked her whether there was a shortage of men, that they had to start sending women here. Half in fun, we all thought of ourselves as border guards, who could not leave Narva lest they send more Russians to replace us. My third deep love bloomed like the earlier ones, a long while after the first meeting. Things became serious in the summer of 1964. After summer vacation, we had a touching reunion. The next summer I met her parents in Toila. Our whole group had bought bicycles on installments, putting ten roubles down, and having ten roubles deducted from our pay for the ensuing six months. This is a fair indication of the financial circumstances of engineers at that time. On our days off we would go on hikes. At the end of September 1965 the two of us took a hike by ourselves in the Carpathians, and in the summer of 1966 decided to get married. In the spring we had been visiting my aunt at Võsu, where we felt very welcomed, and there was nothing to predict dark clouds in our sky. The wedding took place on the 23d of July, a very hot day, in Tallinn. To my surprise my aunt did not come to Tallinn for the wedding. At Võsu a cool welcome awaited us. It was Velda Otsus, whom I had considered to be my spiritual mother, who discreetly opened my eyes to what had happened. She and her family had come to spend the summer with us in 1958, and she had become one of us. She and my aunt got along very well: they both were very honest, humane, modest people, and very competent in their fields. Indeed, for

my aunt my marriage meant a loss, and I would never be able to convince her otherwise.

My wife and I continued to live in the engineers' dormitory, and in April, 1967 were issued a two-room apartment in a new building. Eleven years of dormitory life finally came to an end. On 19 August 1977 we left with a heavy heart for the Iru energy station, then still under construction. Many good colleagues were left behind. We were assigned a one-room apartment in Tallinn, with a promise that we would later get one with two rooms. After 16 years of working in Narva, the first four months at Iru seemed peaceful. Just before New Year's we had to get two small mobile boilers up and running, in order to get a little technological steam and warmth. Coming from Narva, I quickly became convinced that the gap between words and deeds was wider in Tallinn than in the provinces. I had hoped that those who welcomed us to the Iru station would hold to high professional standards, but I was gradually disappointed. I tried to convince the others to work together and only accept work that was up to high standards, so that the capital city would get a well-functioning heating station, but all I heard were ironic remarks: "Was I from the moon and out of touch with reality?" I could not reconcile myself to the shoddy work, and on several occasions forcefully drove men out whose activities I regarded as nothing short of technological crimes. The first incident occurred in January 1978 at 20 below freezing, when the fitters came to the floor to light a wood fire under a half-mounted boiler, which they then filled with water and, misrepresented the year of transfer for that boiler as 1977. As shift foreman, I dismissed them from the floor. In late autumn, brandishing an iron rod, I threw out the director and the fitters from the pumping station when they recklessly demolished a temporary dividing wall to speed up their work, and endangered the pumps already in operation.

On 4 January 1979, my aunt died, and I had a very hard time getting over it. Everything else seemed so trivial. She had had her first heart attack in March 1969. That was the first and last time she ever called me on the telephone. I could tell from her voice that something grave had happened and hurried to Võsu. It turned out that she had overextended herself with snow-shoveling and collapsed. I returned to Narva when she was back on her feet again. The first year following the heart attack she restrained herself a little, but then began to work harder and harder. At the beginning of December 1978 I was with her

for the last time. As I drove away, she said, "Don't come anymore this year!" Then in the late evening of the 4th of January came the three-word telegram, and my world fell apart. I drove along the snow-filled roads to Võsu and reproached myself for not being by her side during her last days. She had died at her barn door, on her way to feed the cow in the morning. The last mistress of Pällo farm was buried at Ilumäe cemetery next to her mother and father. From that day on our Pällo home was empty for many months, and life stopped in the farm where our family had lived for 112 consecutive years.

In 1980 we prepared to activate the first energy unit at Iru, which meant long workdays receiving and testing the installations. It was only later that we heard, from teachers we knew, about the disturbances that had taken place among schoolchildren that autumn.¹⁶ In November we were issued the long-awaited two-room apartment in Lasnamäe, but we were only able to come there from Iru to spend the night. There were no days off during the last month of that year. My aunt's death spurred me on to take up the cause of truth and justice.¹⁷ On the 30th of December 1980, as the one responsible for the installations, I halted the so-called state tests, switching the turbine off with the automatic safety. The system had been put into operation without a cooling gradient, so it could not operate without damaging the turbine. As a result, the state high commission removed me from the position of director of operations, and replaced me with a more compliant department director. The game continued. The Estonian SSR annual quota would not have been filled without a functioning plant on record at Iru, and V. Klauson, the chairman of the Council of Ministers, issued the command to proceed at any price and finish the work. The state commission signed for an unfinished facility, and the required testing was not completed until May. At Iru it was business as usual. At the beginning of January 1985, during a spell of temperatures 26 degrees below freezing, the houses in Lasnamäe went without heat and electricity for several days. This was referred to as an "accident on the energy

¹⁶ Political protests by Tallinn high school students on 22 September 1980, and again on 1 October 1980, against russification, particularly tightened Russian language requirements. The second of these protests took place at the commemorative statue to novelist A. H. Tammsaare.

¹⁷ Allusion to the title of the classic novel by A. H. Tammsaare, published in the early 1930s.

pathway.” I compiled a report about the accidents that had occurred over three or four years, indicating the real causes and the decisions that had led up to them, and submitted it to the inspection department in Leningrad. No one contacted me. They were on the lookout for a reason to get rid of me. That opportunity presented itself on 6 March 1986. The machinist made a gross error during the scheduled halt of a turbine, forgot to turn on the oil pump, and as a result the bearing caps burned through. This was the first serious accident with the turbine installations in five years. Since the personnel had become accustomed to deception and shoving things under the rug, they did not admit to their mistakes. The circumstances I had documented in the course of the investigation were disregarded. The first attempt to fire me did not work. Then they found a place in the workers’ code that stated there was no guarantee of legal protection for a middle-level supervisor, and I was fired on the spot. That was the end of my twenty-five year career in electric stations. I had been isolated, then axed, although I had fought for the general good. The physical fatigue from regular jogging (I was preparing for the Tartu ski marathon) helped me cope and to fall asleep at night.

I began to contest my illegal dismissal, but I knew that there would be nothing left for me to do in the “Estonian Energy” system. From 28 April I began work as the engineer and senior energy specialist for the factory Tekstiil, and was later promoted to head energy specialist there. The work was peaceful; the pay much lower at first, and in addition, according to the court verdict, “damages” to state profits were deducted from my wages. On 26 April 1986 the Chernobyl catastrophe (or “accident”) took place, but this was predictable considering the “pulling the wool over the eyes” politics that had prevailed throughout the Soviet Union. Our own Chernobyl had been the year before, with the consequence of darkness and cold on Lasnamäe.

I worked for six years at the Tekstiil factory, observing the hard shift work the women were doing. This was the beginning of the final collapse of the Soviet system: the phosphorite war, the Plenum of the creative artists’ unions, the Singing Revolution, the founding of new organizations with huge numbers of members.¹⁸ At the beginning I took a skeptical attitude toward all of this, but I followed all the television

¹⁸ For the events of the “second national awakening” see Glossary under Singing Revolution.

broadcasts with deep interest, read the newspapers, and went to every imaginable kind of meeting. The meetings at the Institute on Sütiste Road were unforgettable: the auditorium and the hallway were packed full of people, and through the open door they listened in total silence to the kinds of economic arguments that could only be discussed very privately before. It was in that auditorium that the word IME (Independent Economic Miracle) first appeared on the blackboard. That was an exciting autumn. Signatures were collected *en masse* against changes in the constitution. I considered the first great victory to be the Supreme Soviet's declaration of the sovereignty of Estonian law.

I did not participate in the first gatherings of Siberian survivors, those who had been imprisoned and deported, but I signed up in February, and the first woman I began a conversation with turned out to be a survivor of our famine village of Medvedka. She introduced me to fellow survivors from the Vasjugan region. I attended the meeting of the founding committee, and participated in discussions of the constitution.

On 24 February 1989 our blue-black-and-white national flag was once again raised in Pikk Hermann Tower. As the flag rose and the sound of the national anthem rang out, my tears flowed, and there was only one thought in my head: if only my mother could have seen this, if only my aunt could have seen it. My aunt had kept our family's Estonian flag as a precious treasure, at the bottom of the wardrobe underneath piles of clothing.

My whole life changed with the founding of the organization Memento. In summer 1989 I joined its history commission, and began to work through the information that had been gathered about the fate of my fellow deportees from 1941. I was able to get hold of almost all of the information that pertained to people from the county of Virumaa. I started to compile a list of those sent to Vasjugan, later the Kargasok region was added. As I read the letters of the sufferers, I lived through their pain and sufferings as if they were my own. I read my father's file for the first time on the day of mourning, 14 June 1990, when for the first time Tallinn was filled with flags of mourning. I went to the infamous building on Pagari Street, which also bore a mourning flag. The official who introduced me to the file spoke painstaking Estonian with a Russian accent. By that time, in response to my previous inquiry I had already received, from Sosva, the official report of my father's death on the 6th (7th) of December 1941. When looking through the

file, taking notes was prohibited. About an hour later I sat down outdoors on the first available park bench and wrote down from memory the table of contents along with the document headings and the most important dates. At home I made a more detailed summary. A year later, just before the liquidation of the KGB, I saw the same file for the second time, and at least one page was missing. This was the infamous *Memorandum*, which confirmed that my father could not be used as an agent. Later, when the Memento task force began to work in the archives and go through the files for all of the “repressed,” we saw that there were many of them in which the page numbers had been altered and the accounts contradicted the table of contents. That meant some documents had been intentionally removed. The increasing intensity of my involvement in Memento volunteer work led in the summer of 1992 to my departure from the Tekstiil factory, where economic collapse had already set in. No money was coming in from the goods sent to Russia, and on several occasions, products from the factory were issued in lieu of wages.

Looking back on my past, there have certainly been many moments when I have seen my energy and efforts rewarded. One is my high school graduation, when I got a fair mark for all of my work. The second is 30 September 1980, when I defended my honor as an engineer, turned off the turbine that was operating in an unsafe manner, interrupting the so-called “tests” and issued a challenge to the Soviet regime. The third one I should mention is 14 June 1993, at the memorial evening held on our national day of mourning, at the Sakala Center, where speeches were given by the President of the Republic, the Minister of Culture P.E. Rummo, Pastor Toomas Paul, and myself as representative of Memento. In my speech I was able to give public expression for the first time to the pain of fifty years of occupation: there was a deathly silence in the auditorium. The message that came from my heart had reached the hearts of others.



Selma Tasane

BORN 1926

I was born on 27 July 1926 on the island of Saaremaa, near Orissaare, in the village of Lahe, at Linnanuka farm. Since my home is near the Small Strait, near the ruins of Maasilinna, I have gotten used to the sea and to an open view. I could never live in the woods, as it would seem like a prison to me.

My father's name was Jüri. Father, his brother, and my paternal grandparents left Tooma

farm in the village of Koguva on the island of Muhu, on the other side of the strait, and settled in Saaremaa. My grandfather and Juhan Smuul's¹ father were cousins: their fathers were brothers.

Our homestead was 14.3 hectares. My father and my uncle built a house and stable 15–20 meters away from the seashore. The house had a reed roof, three rooms, and a kitchen. Grandfather was a short, spry man, light on his feet. When they were first starting out, his responsibility was the farmwork. Livestock was kept at the small fisherman's farm, as much as the place would support: one horse, two cows, three sheep, two pigs. The horse, Juku, was a little, short-legged brown gelding, but a strong animal, hard-headed, as Father was fond of saying. Father himself was 185 centimeters tall, and strong, too, so he and Juku were well matched. Father's work was feeding the animals, going to the mill, and hauling wood. From the time the ice melted in spring

¹ Juhan Smuul, Estonian writer (1922–1971), born on the island of Muhu in Koguva village. Smuul wrote poetry and prose in postwar Estonia, and is best known for his humorous narratives set on Estonia's islands, and plays, the most popular of which was *Kihnu Jõnn*, or the Captain from the Woods (1964).

until the sea water got cold again in the fall, Father and Uncle spent most of their time fishing. In the winter, the men prepared fishing traps indoors. They would weave the trap-sheets by hand and go looking for trap-stakes in the woods. Everything had to be in order for the spring fishing season. My father was a wonderful man. He made all of our tables, chairs, and beds with his own hands, as well as all the beer casks, barrels, and tubs in the household. He also made tools, wagons, and sleds, as well as horseshoes at the blacksmith's. He knew how to work, but he also knew how to rest; he had respect for the Estonian people, the republic, and the blue-black-and-white flag, which always flew in our yard on Victory Day and Independence Day.²

In February 1925 my father had brought himself a wife from Simukse farm in the neighboring village of Orinõmme. Little Kristiina, who was only 158 cm tall, was also from Muhu. Tiina, as they began to call her, was a spunky woman with a cheerful disposition. There was no work imaginable that she could not manage.

After I was born, my mother's life took a new turn. There was a little upstart of a girl who wanted rocking in the cradle, whom she would often later reproach: "Bad girl, you ruined a nice rye-harvesting day for me; I had to interrupt my work in the fields and come inside!"³

My first memories, the ones I call to mind again and again, are bound up with my grandfather. I must have been about three years old. There were high snowdrifts in the yard, and I was sitting near the window in Grandfather's lap. He was singing to me, "Selma is still a little girl, no suitor will come to her..." Grandmother was a good person, too. She was very hospitable, and offered food to all who came to visit us. Grandmother had very high regard for her daughter-in-law, my mother, that is. The old and the young farmer's wives worked together very harmoniously. There was one thing my grandmother did not like, however, and that was my mother's religion. My mother was of the Russian Orthodox faith, but the other family members were Lutherans.

² Victory Day (*Võidupüha*) was celebrated on 23 June, the eve of Midsummer, and Estonian Independence Day on 24 February. (See Glossary.)

³ A good, strong Estonian woman never skips a beat for childbirth: she gives birth in the hedgerow, takes a few moments to wrap her child, and keeps on working. This is an influential and enduring ideal image of womanhood in Estonian culture. (See also Linda Põldes and Elmar-Raimund Ruben's life stories)

This was not an obstacle as far as marriage went. Though they had wanted to christen me as a Lutheran, too, Mother's word prevailed.

When I was four years old, Father and Uncle began building an addition to the house. The new wing had two bedrooms, a living room, and a vestibule. It was completed in early spring 1932. On 7 May 1932, my brother Alexander was born in the new bedroom. I was very happy about my brother. As he was six years younger than me, I often had to look after him and rock his cradle.

It was a family custom to say grace before every meal. My grandmother would say the prayer, but when she got older, she handed the prayer book over to my father, saying, "You are my oldest child, it is your turn now to read." Father took the book from her and negotiated a "discount" he would read only at the evening meal. In the mornings he was busy, and had to go out to sea, and did not have much time. Grandmother accepted this.

What a good time it was when Father and Uncle were fishermen! I could eat as much eel as I wished. Even now thinking about it makes my mouth water. But strange things sometimes happened as well. Once, after a storm when the traps were full of eels, while the men were loading the catch into the fishing well-boats and anchored the boats at the nearby island, thieves came in the night. They were locals, the first communists of the Estonian time,⁴ who did not want to bother themselves with working and spent their time loitering about. Father and Uncle had no idea who the thieves were, but it slipped out by accident. In the morning one of the men from our village came to our fishing beach and said "I am so sleepy today, I did not get much sleep last night. The Ellam boys and some others came to our house last night. They had gotten a huge bagful of eels from somewhere and came to our place to cook them." That was the same morning that Father and Uncle discovered that "uninvited guests" had carried off their catch of eels.

When I turned eight I began attending the Maasi elementary school, located about a kilometer away in an old manor house. I went to school there for the next six years. All the children from the surrounding villages, as well as the Orissaare children attended the Maasi elementary school, and the number of pupils was always somewhere

⁴ "Estonian time" was the popular locution for the era of the Estonian republic 1918–1940.

around 60. The Christmas celebrations were a lot of fun. In the big hall the schoolbenches were pushed together to make a large stage, and two-to three act plays would be performed. We learned Christmas songs and read poetry. Father Christmas would come after the performance was over and bring gifts for everyone. After he left, the social began, with music and dancing; the young people from the area danced until well after midnight.

My studies went well through the fourth grade. In fifth grade I started getting lazy, and could not be bothered with solving mathematics problems. In those days we had a neighbor's boy helping with the traps. He would do my mathematics problems for me every day. And so my homework grades were good, but I was caught out at school. Mr. Aas talked to my parents about it: "I wonder what is up with that girl? All of her homework problems are correct, but at the blackboard, she doesn't know a thing." My favorite lesson was literature. Almost all of my compositions were read aloud in class. But one time I made a stupid mistake, and got ridiculed. The title of that composition was "If I lived in the sunny south." I wrote quite a bit on that topic, including that I would climb around in the trees with the monkeys, eating "bajaanid."⁵ The teacher said it was a careless mistake, and gave me a 4 because there were no other mistakes. The last essay I wrote in the 6th grade was entitled "The Sky." That was a really long one, so long, in fact, that I filled an entire notebook with it. The mark was 5 with a double plus.

During the first Estonian time, President Konstantin Päts made a visit to Saaremaa. This was a memorable day for us schoolchildren. We went out to the Tumala schoolyard to welcome the president, lined up in double file, with flowers in our hands. The president walked between our two straight rows, and made a speech in front of the schoolhouse. When we got home again, a man who had caught a whiff of communism asked us, "Did you children notice the President's shoes? The sole of his shoe was loose. The republic must be very poor, if he came out in public with shoes like that." No one believed him.

When the first Estonian era ended and the Russians marched in, the neighbor's girl and I were in our living room. We happened to look out the window. A band of Russian soldiers passed behind our house

⁵ A mistake of one letter. Bananas are "banaanid." The word "bajaanid" means accordions.

on the seaward side. The neighbor's girl was a year and a half older than me, and had a livelier disposition. She said, "Let's go outside, and take a closer look at them." One soldier sprawled down on his belly and called to us, "Juli, Juli, come here!" He pointed underneath his belly. The other soldiers laughed heartily. We ran back into the house. From that time on I had a strong sense of contempt for the Russian army.

In 1940, during Soviet rule, a seventh grade class was opened in the Uuemõisa school. My schooling came to an end in that seventh grade. Father wanted me to continue, but I firmly refused. At home I began sharing the farm work with my parents. My maternal aunt was a seamstress, and I would often visit her to learn how to ply the needle. My dream was becoming a tailor. At home I would cut out patterns from magazines and try to sew dresses. Since there was not much cloth available at that time. I cut up old clothes, and tried to sew blouses and dresses out of them. To my own mind, they turned out rather well.

In the spring of 1942, Grandmother tripped on a patch of heather in the pasture and took a fall. Father and Uncle carried her inside to bed, and that was where she stayed until the end of her life.

I attended confirmation classes during the German occupation. That summer, after confirmation, I turned seventeen. The neighbor boy's wedding took place before the Christmas holidays. He was a relative, and I was asked to be a bridesmaid. A large pickup truck had been ordered to take the wedding party to the church. We waited and waited, but the truck did not come. Then we started out on bicycles: the bride and groom in front, and twelve young men and ladies after them. We had already ridden two to three kilometers on bicycles when the truck arrived. Everyone climbed on, and the bicycles were loaded on as well. After about five kilometers, the side of the truck flew off on a curve and everyone was thrown off, the bicycles landing in a heap on top of the people. I was one of the last ones to get out from underneath. I could still stand up, but my spine and right hip were horribly painful. It was very hard to stand up during the wedding ceremony. When the knot had been tied, everyone piled back onto the truck and we were off to the wedding party. One of the other girls and I started off on foot instead. My bicycle was as broken as I was. The next day Father hitched the horse to the wagon, and took me to the doctor, near the Pöide church. Dr. Vironen was a very wise physician, but he had no remedy for me. He only said that there did not seem to be any broken bones; instead there was a concussion and maybe a few cracks in

some places. I did not get any medical help whatsoever. I became a lame young person, who still had the breath of life in her, but who was of no use to anyone in the household.

During the German occupation, the Germans put out beach patrols. Their headquarters were in Orissaare. My father had been a German prisoner-of-war for three years during the First World War, and had learned to speak German. The Germans on beach patrol duty started passing through our yard to talk with him. Since Germans are a beer-loving people, and know how to hold their beer, Father brought them Saaremaa beer to taste. One man got a bit tipsy. Our neighbor was visiting, and a little in the cups as well, and started to teach the German the frog dance. Everyone was laughing, and our neighbor went on dancing with the Germans. Finally, when they had had enough, the German got so sad that he started to cry. Father asked, "Now what's up?" The German explained, "I don't know why I have to drink beer and dance here among strangers. I have a wife and four children at home. I'd rather be home. I don't know whether I'll ever see them again. Stalin and Hitler should be tied together at the neck and thrown over the roof, and whoever pulls the other one over the roof is the winner."

Time passed, and times changed. The German era was coming to an end. It was rumored that half of Estonia had already fallen to the Russians. Two weeks before the battle, when we were harvesting potatoes in the field, Karl, the German, came to say goodbye. He and Father hugged each other and wept, promising to write to each other once the war was over, if they both survived. Father waited for years, but a letter never came. Perhaps Karl rests in the soil of our own Saaremaa.

Before the battle the houses close to the shore filled up with Germans. The planes flew overhead, and if a soldier as much as moved in any of the yards, he would be fired on from above. Mother and I were in the house when a plane flew overhead; a German soldier ran inside, and immediately they fired on the wall of the house. The German grabbed my mother with one hand, me with the other, and pushed us into the corner by the stove, where it was supposedly safer.

The soldiers helped Father dig holes in the ground to bury more clothing and other household goods. They said that the more we buried, the better. The houses would be burned down, and we would have nothing left.

A few days before the battle, strict orders were given out—we had to leave our homes. Father, Mother's brother, and I made preparations to leave. Father hitched Juku to the wagon, loaded on our household goods, and off we were to the woods. We stumbled along behind the wagon. The night was pitch dark, and Mother and I took turns falling. In Orinõmme village we met up with my maternal uncle's family. Toward dawn we reached the Tagaaru woods, about ten kilometers away. Father and Uncle unhitched the horses from the wagons and tied them to the hay barn, under the eaves. We climbed into the barn and burrowed into the hay. My aunt had a little four-month-old daughter. Life in the woods must have been new to her, and she cried often. My grandmother and my uncle stayed home. Grandmother did not want to come along, saying she had her own home, where it was warm, and what could happen to her anyway? For three years she had been lying in bed, paralyzed. Things got rough on the night of 3 October. Of the 37 households in the three villages of Maasi, Mäe, and Lahe, they burned down 17 homes. Our home was destroyed by the fire, as well. My 80-year-old grandmother perished in the house. A calf and 30 chickens were also caught in the fire. The Germans had slaughtered our pig, and boiled most of the meat, but ran out of time to eat it all. They had taken it to the pantry along with the kettle, where we found most of the meat, salted in a barrel. It was a good thing that the storerooms and other outbuildings were spared from the fire. There were other households where everything in the yard had been burned down. In our village the grain had not been threshed, but the piles of grain were left intact.

When the machines of war had rolled on, we gathered up our things and started on our way home. Yes... homeward... though there wasn't really any home left... Juku trotted so fast that we could hardly keep up with him; we were almost running after the wagon. He must have been very homesick. When our yard came into view behind the ruins of Maasilinna, Juku picked up his head, reared up on his back legs and whinnied in a wild tone we had never heard before. Finally, Father took firm hold of his bridle, and dragged him into the yard. It took a long time for him to get used to the new situation. We gathered up Grandmother's bleached white bones. Father made a little wooden box, and we put her remains into it. We took the box into the pantry, where it stayed until Christmas.

We could not stay home for the winter, since the little sauna with its stove was very old and too cold. There were two old people living in

our neighbor's house, and they invited us to live with them. The neighbor's wife said to us, "Come and stay with us. We have an empty living room, and after the war it is too quiet. It will be happier for us, too." We found ourselves some beds in the village. And so, despite all of the sadness, there was at least one happier winter. Every night the rooms were full of laughter.

On the second day of Christmas, a very cold day, we held Grandmother's funeral. Her remains were taken to the Muhu graveyard, to be buried next to Grandfather. I did not go along to the burial. Maybe that was why I started having dreams about her every night. The dreams were always very frightening: she would come to meet me somewhere in the yard, with no eyes or with half of her face burned, then as a blackened moving clump without hands or feet. Each time I would wake up with chills running up and down my spine. Finally I was so exhausted I could no longer sleep.

After some time, someone gave me advice: "Go to the graveyard and say the Lord's Prayer at her grave. You'll see, she will disappear from your dreams." One quiet spring day I took my bicycle and rode to Muhu to say prayers for my grandmother. That night when I went to bed, I wondered how she would show herself to me in the dream. But she did not come anymore; she left me in peace. Over 50 years have passed since Grandmother perished, and I have never dreamed about her again.

In the spring of 1945, Father and Uncle put a new roof on the stone ruins of the stable. This was the first building in the Maasi settlement to get a new roof after the war ended. After the stable was finished, they went to the woods by the hay meadow to chop wood. From the raw oak logs they felled, they built a large room to replace the old sauna.

In those days the men were no longer allowed to go out to sea. The boats were pulled up on the beach, and the Russians ordered them to be sawed in half. When Father asked why, he was told, so that the people could not flee to Sweden. Uncle took a saw and went out to the pasture where the boats were. He looked at them for a long time thoughtfully, before setting to work. He sawed both the motorboat and the rowboat in half, and two more boats besides, which had belonged to a Muhu man who had fled to Sweden before the Russians came. Another piece of valuable property destroyed! Later, when going to sea was permitted again, the men got themselves a new boat. But there

were no more large catches of fish, as there had been in the Estonian and the German time.

When the *kolkhozes*⁶ came, our young horse Maksi was taken away—whom Father had already had a chance to train—as well as a cow and two sheep, farm equipment, wagons, and sleds. Our old horse Juku was given to our neighbor, whose horse had just died, just a few months before we joined the *kolkhoz*. In the first years of the *kolkhozes* the wages were so low that they were not even worth mentioning. Mother did the farm work, and Father went to the Orissaare fish depot to build boxes; Uncle remained a fisherman.

In the fall of 1947, I was genuinely happy to get a job as an apprentice with a men's tailor in Väljaküla. I was still struggling with the injuries I got at that wedding party, but my wish to become a tailor won out over my illness. I found lodgings with a girl from my confirmation class who lived nearby. One of my other classmates from grade seven lived there as well. He would often come and visit me in the evenings after work. I soon found out that he was not a proper gentleman, that he was interested in only one thing, and we got into a fight. He tipped his hat and left, saying he would find himself some other girl.

I had done six months of my tailor's apprenticeship when the co-operative cut off its professional ties with my supervisor. That put an end to things for me.

In 1948 my maternal cousin and I went to Tallinn to sell apples. It had been a bad year for apples on the mainland. Our apples sold well. A gypsy came up to us and said "I will look at your hand, if you give me a few apples." It was a deal. The gypsy predicted: "In your youth you have been very ill for a very long time, but you will get well. Soon death will come into the house." When she saw my frightened face, she said, "There are five or six years yet. Then the next death will come in another five years. You will get married, but not very young—when you are older. There will be one child, and he will grow up. Then, after some time, two more deaths." My middle age was to bring health and a long period of happiness. But then....ah! there would be another whole string of deaths, and very soon after that, a time when something would get the best of me. Finally, she added, "You will have a long life, you will live to a ripe old age." That gypsy knew what she was talking about.

⁶ *Kolkhoz* (collective farm) see Glossary.

One time Juhan Smuul⁷ paid us a visit. He and Father took turns making serious talk and joking. In the end it came to an argument. Father said, "That damned Russian army should be thrown out of here, and the Estonian government should come back." Juhan started laughing. "Listen, no one is ever going to get them out of here. They're here, and they're here to stay." Father replied: "I don't believe that we'll never get rid of them. Someday a time will come when they have to leave. Even if my eyes never see it, my children will. Let them bring an Estonian flag to my grave, and let it fly there for three days." I made Father a promise that I would do as he had wished. And I have fulfilled it.

In the spring of 1951, one of my maternal aunts invited me to Tallinn: "You're not doing anything at home, come and feed our pig for a month, while we come to Saaremaa for a vacation." Father and Mother agreed, and so did I. My aunt took me to see an elderly doctor, from the Estonian time. There was a sign on his door, "Dr. Grigorjev, nerve doctor." The doctor hit me with his little hammer all over, till I had enough. Then he started to give me injections. One a day at first, 30 roubles a shot, later two in the same session. It made my legs feel stiff, but the doctor claimed that was how it was supposed to be. A month later I felt things improving. After many wasted years of youth, I finally got well again.

In December 1951, I found an advertisement in the newspaper: dress design courses were about to begin in Tallinn. Since I had already had a taste of tailoring work, I decided to enroll. The courses held my interest. When I got back home, a local woman immediately came to me with fabric. I drew the pattern and made her a suit. In the meantime, a sewing workshop had been opened in the village of Ariste, near Orissaare, and I went to check it out. Since I had already studied sewing for half a year, they gladly took me on. My first day of work was the 5th of May, and my first assignment was to make a buttonhole in a piece of cloth. I was praised for it. After the trial period of one month, I drew full wages. I was a happy woman; my work was also my hobby. I could have done that work night and day, forgetting to sleep and eat.

As the old saying goes, the only people suited for the life of a tailor are either lame or crazy. Since I was light on my feet, my co-workers said, "That means something has to be wrong with you upstairs."

⁷ See footnote 1 for this story.

Maybe so! My mouth worked overtime. My coworkers laughed and laughed. When I had hardly been working for a month, a car from the Leisi Industrial Plant pulled up. Eight or nine men jumped out of the car and came inside. I asked what was up. I looked them all over. One of them, the last one, whom my eyes fastened on, was leaning on the doorpost. I stood there staring at him without blinking an eye. For the first time in my life I saw the kind of man I had set up as my ideal when I was 15 or 16 years old. There he stood: tall, moderately stocky, with a sun-tanned complexion. For quite a while we looked one another in the eye, with serious faces. He was a little more timid, and turned his eyes away. Later we discovered that both of us had fallen in love at first sight.

After a few more meetings, that same man, whose name was Tasane, came to the sewing workshop, with a bundle of fabric under his arm. He had bought a nice, expensive piece of black cloth with white stripes. I asked, "Is this going to be for a wedding suit?" He said, "Just so." I teased him, "Who is the happy woman who is being taken, where is she?" The answer was quick: "You." I went on joking, "Oh! I'm game. But that means I have to make myself a new dress, too." "Well, go on and do it!"⁸

Since a singing festival was coming up in Orissaare,⁹ he was promised his suit by that time. The next day I went to Kuressaare, and bought myself the fabric for a light-green silk dress. I sewed it at home. When that driver came to try on his new suit, he immediately gave me a nice look. I, too, made a sly face. On the day of the song festival, 13 July, I put my new light-green dress on, took my bicycle, and off I went to Orissaare. I put my bicycle in the backyard of a house at the edge of town, and walked toward the place where the song festival was about to take place.

What finally happened was that Tasane and I went together to pick up his musical instrument. It turned into a very long trip. First we took a long walk on the seashore, and then walked another kilometer along the Kuivastu road. At the gate of my house he turned his car around, and we chatted a bit more. A moment later he roared off. I listened for a little while longer for the sound of his car, which

⁸ Contrast this story of love and courtship with Tuuli Jaik's life story.

⁹ Singing festival: in addition to the nation-wide song festivals held in Tallinn every four years, local song festivals were also organized. See Glossary.

seemed unusual, until it grew more distant, and finally disappeared altogether. I was happy. The song festival had been very pleasant in every way.

Two weeks after the festival, when I came home from work, my mother handed me a letter. I did not recognize the handwriting. I opened the letter, and to my great joy discovered that it was written by Tasane. He invited me out to meet him at 11:30 in the evening at the Randküla shop. It was twelve kilometers away. Since I got home from work very late, I said to Father and Mother, "I am not going. Tomorrow I will write him a letter and make an excuse."

We chatted for a bit, and then I went up to the attic to bed. I was just starting to get sleepy when I heard that familiar rumbling from the direction of the heath. Ten minutes later he was at our gate. I looked out the window and he stopped under the trapdoor of our hayloft, then climbed up the ladder. I opened the hatch. Tasane asked, "Well, how come you were right at the door?" I said I had heard the sound of his car.

I invited him up to the attic, and fastened the latch on the inside. Since I had told him that I slept on a bed of chaff, he was amazed that it was a real room. And when I told him the story of how that room was made, he did not want to believe it at first. After the war, when the house had burned down, I no longer had my own room. I tried to figure out where I could find a place to sleep, and decided to make myself a room in the attic. At the seashore, I chopped up those four boats that the Russians had sawed in two into good-sized pieces, pulled the boards apart, brought them up to the attic, and made some walls. I covered them with cardboard, and put some wall-paper on top of that. And got myself a room, and it looked just the way it looked now.

Then I went on to ask him: "First of all, tell me why you came here. Did you come for my sake, or in order to get something from me?" He answered, "Both." I replied "Then there is something about me that you have not understood. You think I am an easy catch, someone who has hovered near you, done lots of stupid things with you, and said a lot of things. I am a poor girl, and I don't even have a proper home, since the war destroyed that. I have been very ill, and I work as a tailor because I don't even dare try to do any heavy work. Besides, I am not even pretty." He replied, "As the saying goes, take a woman from a poor place, and from a rich place, buy a horse." I continued.

“But there is something to me after all. I have two strong hands to feed myself with. I am really a very serious girl, and take life seriously, even though I am cheery and like to have fun. And keep in mind: tomorrow, on the 27th of July, I will turn 26. So far, I have not ‘passed under men.’ And that will not happen until I am thirty years old.” When he asked, “Why?” I answered, “I just want to be young for awhile longer, and get the hang of the tailor’s trade. After that I want to get married and start having children. If I got married right away, the children would come tumbling in, one right after another, and life would be miserable. If you agree with me, you will come back here again; but if you think ah, that’s not what I want in a girl, then it’s a sure thing that you will never to return. But I will wait for you...” The next Saturday he came back, and he turned into my best friend.

One year had passed since we got acquainted, and he came to propose, carrying a bag full of liquor bottles. I reminded him that I was not going to get married until I was 30. Tasane got very thoughtful: “Well, all right then!” I took the “betrothal liquor” (eight bottles of vodka and one of liqueur) to the pantry, and put them into the cupboard to await their time.

That summer my father got sick. It was a serious illness, and he was sent to the Tallinn Oncology Hospital, where they operated, did radiation treatments, and finally wanted to give him a silver voicebox. Father refused: “I want to die with my own throat, I don’t need a new one.” He was sent home. At first he was quite spry, but gradually he grew weaker. Two weeks before he died, Tasane came to visit us. His father had just died, and he came to invite me to the funeral. I did not dare leave home, as my father was also waiting for the “uninvited guest.”

The night before he died, Father got out of bed, and came into the kitchen where I was. He said, “I feel so well today, and I am quite hungry. Do you have something for me?” I gave him potatoes and gravy, and on top of that a plateful of semolina porridge with fruit sauce. He said, “I am full now.” He stood up and said to me, “Well, then! Have yourself a good life with your Tasane.” Father died at six the next morning. He left quietly. The previous evening he had given me his blessing for my future life. Father’s funeral took place on 17 February 1954. Though he was a Lutheran, the service was held in the Öörikü Russian Orthodox Church. It was the same day and the same church where he and Mother had been married 29 years earlier.

At the beginning of April, 1958 I brought the “betrothal liquor” out from the pantry chest and went to Leisi, to woo Tasane.¹⁰ I got a scolding for it: “Why did you have to haul the bottles here?” We agreed to clinch the matter in secret. We came to town by bus from different directions, I from Orissaare, he from Leisi. Our marriage was formalized on the 30th of April. I was 31 years old, and turned 32 later that year. My husband was eight days short of 40.

That fall my mother burst a second blood vessel, and from that time on she grew steadily weaker. She died in 1959, also in February. As 17 February had become a historic day in Father and Mother’s lives, her funeral was held on that same date. There were three of us left, now: my uncle, my brother, and myself. My husband continued to live in Leisi. On 24 May 1959 my daughter Galina was born. As the saying goes, a good child has many names: besides Galina, we also called her Galja, Kalla, and Kai.

That I had made “mistakes” during my pregnancy soon became apparent. I had killed three rats in the stable, taken them outside, and lined them up in a row, with their tails pointing up, their bodies down. My daughter had three skin tags hanging from her ear, similar to those rats, bodies pointed downward. While expecting, I had gone to milk the cows and hit my forehead on the stable door. There was a raised red mark about the size of a thumbprint on my daughter’s forehead, with blood vessels spreading out from it. When she was three years old, I went to Kuressaare to show that birthmark to the doctor, Ants Haavle. He said, “One shouldn’t touch these things. It could turn into cancer if you poke at it.” But then someone taught me: “About that birthmark on the forehead: it will go away the same way it came. If you hear that someone has died, go and have the dead person’s hand rub it.” And so it happened that a nice old person died in the village. I took my daughter with me and spoke to the family of the departed about the matter. They kindly allowed me to go and see the corpse. I lifted my daughter up; the daughter-in-law of the departed took her mother-in-law’s hand, and with it we massaged the birthmark. I believed in the magical power of the dead person’s hand. And with time the birthmark disappeared. With the skin tag “rats” I was able to manage myself:

¹⁰ A bold, playful, and stubborn reversal of traditional gender roles for courting.

I tied pieces of yarn around them, tightening them little by little, and finally they fell off her earlobes.

My great-uncle Jaan became my daughter's babysitter and caretaker. He would sit on a chair holding a flyswatter. Whenever a fly would come, he would give it such a blow that it would be quiet immediately. When Galina would be naughty, she, too, would get a swat. Of course, not so hard that she would fall flat, more for the fun of it. They got along famously.

When Galina was four years old, my brother, who was thirty-one at the time, got married to a nineteen-year-old girl from the neighboring village. I was against the match, because that girl seemed different from other girls. My brother said, "If you don't like it that I am bringing this girl home, I'll leave myself." I gave in. The young bride was brought to us, and there was a big wedding. A year later, a daughter was born to them, named Tiina. My great-uncle had her to watch, too. The next child was a boy, Jüri, a few years younger than Tiina. But my grand-uncle could no longer mind him, since he had already taken to his bed.

Our children were often home alone, and did whatever they wished. Jüri was quite fond of me. When I would come home from work in the evening, he would meet me at the gate, and if the weather was bad, he would be sitting in the kitchen waiting for me. But he died two weeks after his sixth birthday. He had leukemia. They did blood transfusions many times, but it did not help. Death won out.

Five years after my nephew's death Uncle Jaan died. He had been bedridden for eleven years. After my mother's death he thought we would probably send him to an old folks' home. Fearing this, he tried to hang himself, tying a rope to the end of his bed, with the other end around his neck. Luckily we caught him in time. I said to him, "Uncle, don't do that. You lived here before we did, and you have been a good uncle to us. Be in bed and stay with us as long as you need to." My uncle calmed down, handed me the rope, and lived with us in good spirits until his death. Since he had grown quite hard of hearing, he sang in bed in such a loud voice that sometimes it would frighten us.

His funeral was in early spring. It is said that the weather on the day of the funeral resembles the person being buried. We kept an open mind about that. According to the forecast, it would be stormy weather, since Uncle had been a prankster all his life.

On the morning of the funeral the weather was somewhat windy, but when they went to bring Uncle from the pantry out to the yard, it

turned stormy indeed. The eternite plates stacked up in the yard, were tossed into the air like butterflies. When we were at the cemetery and they started to lower the casket into the tomb, the fury started again. The storm rose, and there was a proper blizzard. As soon as the grave was filled in, it calmed down. When we laid the wreaths and flowers on the grave, the weather was already quite normal, when we got home, the storm had subsided. During the night it grew very calm. The next morning it was a lovely sunny day. That time the saying was fulfilled; as was the man, so the weather.

One of the people who attended Uncle's funeral pointed a finger at me and said, "When that one dies, the weather will be even worse. With her pranks, she outdoes her uncle hands down." They thought that things might even turn out so bad that they wouldn't even be able to bury me on the appointed day, and would only succeed on the second or third day.

After my uncle's burial, there came a longer spell of happiness. Our daughter finished high school and spent a year as bookkeeper at the Orissaare boarding school. In the summer evenings when the weather was nice, she and the neighbor's girl who was about the same age, would row out to sea in a rubber boat. What fun they had! A year after graduating from high school she went to vocational school in Viljandi, where she studied leatherworking. After completing the training she went to work at the Linda factory, sewing leather bags.

My husband and I were left to ourselves. We laughed that now we were going to have a honeymoon, since before there hadn't been any time for it. Life was very good. My husband said: "I have been able to settle in a really lovely place." There was space all around us, with the sea right under our window. If you wanted to look back toward the shore, you could take a spyglass and climb up on the castle ruins. And the white swans would come right up under the window with their chicks. One spring a pair of swans had hatched seven chicks on an island near us. We started feeding them. They grew so bold that they would come right into the yard, to the call of "kluu-kluu." After they ate they would stay with us for an hour or so, and then march out the gate again in a row, back to the shore. Each one would leave their "marks" behind.

On 27 July 1981 I made an end of my tailoring work at the Orissaare studio. I had always loved my work. Now I was leaving. It was a little sad to close the door on my workroom for the last time. But I got

over that quickly, since now I would be free without having to rush off to work every time. My husband was eight years older than me. He was a professional driver, and that had been his line of work for forty years running. He retired a year before me, in 1980. He even worked two more years into his retirement.

When our daughter turned twenty-four, she decided to get married. She found the address of a Saaremaa boy in a newspaper advertisement. She wrote to him, and the answer came quickly. On a whim they held their wedding. At first they lived with his parents for a few years. Then my husband bought our daughter a house in town, with a garden, so the children would be able to run around in their own yard. After the children were born, our daughter had to return to work, and I had to go to town to mind the house and take care of the children.

Before we moved to Kuressaare, my husband and I were in the field picking potatoes. When we had picked the last rows, my husband suddenly said, "Well, this year I can still help you pick potatoes, next year you'll have to manage on your own." I asked, "What makes you think you won't be here next year?" He replied, "I just know, and maybe it will happen quite soon." I stood there, gazing at him sadly. Tears came into my eyes. After a moment's silence, he stood up, and said "Maybe it won't happen after all. Let's go home." There was no more said about it.

On Friday evening, 15 November, I came home. It was a nice day. On Saturday night my husband and my brother went out to drop the nets. On Sunday mornings they would bring in lots of fish from those nets. That whetted their appetite, so later on they added an extra net. The radio forecast said a storm was coming. When the men reached the shore, I told them about the weather forecast, but they didn't believe it. I said I had a strange feeling that night, and that I was afraid of the storm, and of the men going out to sea. My husband threw his head back. "Ja-jah! We aren't as stupid as you think." I said, "If it should happen that way, then I'll have you know I will never marry again. I will care for your grave, but I won't be like some women, the ones who cry over their husband's grave every week. It's not that I wouldn't want to visit your grave, but I am sixty-five years old, I don't drive myself, and I don't have anyone to drive me. There wouldn't be any point in keeping a car when you're gone, anyway. As long as I can make the twelve kilometer round trip on a bicycle, I'll come and visit you from time to time. Wait for me, then, underneath

those birches, until I am brought to join you.” My husband didn’t say anything in reply.

I started on my way home with a heavy heart. How could I have guessed that that was the last time I would see my husband alive.

On Sunday night there was a heavy storm. Early in the morning it quieted down for a bit, as if to pause and gather strength. That night I had a horrible dream. I was at home, indoors. The dogs started howling in the yard. I looked out the window. There were two men in the yard, dressed in black. I went outside and asked: “Who are you looking for? If you are looking for my brother, then let me tell you, he left home.” The men looked at each other helplessly. One of them said: “We came to get them.” The other men started laughing in a chilly tone, and said, “Who are you to come to pick anyone up? You’re dead yourself.” I looked at them with a frightened face and... then I woke up. I looked at the clock, and it was exactly 2 in the morning. I sat bolt upright in bed. I thought, I’ll go wake up my son-in-law to take me home in the car. Otherwise something awful is going to happen. But then I calmed myself down. After all, my husband had said, “We aren’t as stupid as you think.” And my son-in-law would have scolded me. Monday passed, full of heartache. On Tuesday the pain let up a little. I thought to myself, if anything had happened, someone would have brought news by now. On Tuesday evening my nephew came and said, “Your husband and my father both drowned. We took them to town for the autopsy. They are in the morgue.” When I heard the news I grew very calm. After all, my dream had predicted something like this would happen. But my daughter broke into tears, for she had lost a good father and uncle.

When the caskets were brought home, I went up to my husband, grabbed him by the buttons of his suitcoat and shook him: “What have you done, man? Are you happy now? Now you can sleep in your casket with a smile on your face.” I had lost two people close to me at the same time. Both of them were good men. Neither one was a drunkard or a smoker. There had been something strange about both of their lives and their fates. My brother had been born on 7 May, my husband on 8 May. Every year they celebrated their birthdays together, went out to sea together; they both drowned, and were buried side by side in the Ööriku graveyard.

At home the rooms were empty of men. The yard, where there had always been lots of laughter and joking, grew quiet. My brother’s

singing was gone. The only thing left was the screaming of the seagulls as they circled above the yard.

Even when my brother Sass was a little boy, my mother would say, "That child won't die, he will drown one day." We asked her how she knew. My mother answered, "It's old folk wisdom. The ones with two cowlicks right on top of their heads all drown."

While I was in town I had another significant dream. I was at home, behind the storage shed, and I suddenly heard the loud clattering noise of a wagon passing in front of my sister-in-law's house, moving toward the gate. I ran out from behind the storehouse to see who was driving by. An alder-bark-colored horse was hitched to the wagon, and a light brown cow was tied onto the wagon with a rope. The cow looked back toward the yard, and the horse tore out of the yard, and disappeared behind the fortress. There was no coachman; the horse was on its own.

When I got back from town, I told my sister-in-law the dream, and explained it to her. "It means you are going to get married and leave this place." Indeed, my sister-in-law was soon in the mood to find herself a husband. She looked in the newspapers for personals ads, chose three addresses, and wrote to all of them. All of them responded. The third one was from the Kihelkonna area. And he was the "alder-colored horse" who took my sister-in-law away. Tell me that dreams do not predict things.

When I went back home for the first time after my sister-in-law left, it was a sad sight. The gate was flung open as far as it would go; the two doors of the shed were flapping in the wind; the shovel was on the ground in the middle of the yard, and there were deep car tracks in the ground. No one from our family has ever been taken to Siberia, but when I came home that day I had a feeling that reminded me of the deportations. I stood sadly among the buildings for a while, and I remembered the story about the pair of swans that came and walked in our yard. A few years later they made a nest in the reeds on the seashore. When the mother swan was already sitting on the nest, a fox killed her. The father swan swam sadly alone by the shore. In the evenings he could often be seen sitting near the pile of bones that had been his mate. The carcass of the mother swan stayed in the same place for a few summers. Finally we found the father swan, dead, lying next to her. That was a swan's faithfulness.

Once they asked an old man whose wife had died when he was young, "Why have you not taken a new wife?" He answered: "I gave

my word to her while she was alive, and I will keep my word to the dead.” Those are some of the most beautiful words ever spoken. It is a good thing to remember them as signs of what faithfulness means.

Life keeps hurrying on, and there is no stopping it. I have the feeling that my husband has never left; he keeps on living by my side, even though I can’t see him. Every night, after I have gone to bed, pulled the covers over me, and closed my eyes, I see a familiar picture: he is standing by the doorpost, and we are gazing at each other silently, holding our breath.

I am an old woman now. The gypsy’s predictions have come true. When I was young, I was ill for many years. Five years later, death came to our house (Father). Five more years and death came again (Mother). I married late (at 32 years of age). One child was born (a daughter). Two deaths close together (my nephew and my uncle). Then many lovely years (15 of them). Then a string of deaths (husband and brother). Finally, something “struck me down” (I broke my leg and was bedridden in a cast). It was predicted that I would have a long life. That says it all. I have lived through nine predictions. And I am halfway into the tenth one.



Asta Luksepp

BORN 1932

I was born on 29 October 1932 at Mäksa farm, in the county of Viljandimaa, in Tarvastu township, in the village of Kuressaare.¹ My family had been a farming family for many generations: my father Juhan Rennit's forebears had begun keeping Mäksa farm at least as far back as 1780. My mother, Alice Johanna Rennit (born Lamson) was from Otsa farm, in the village of Kivilõppe, township of Suislepa.

Many times in my life I have had to write the story of my life and hide the truth. Recently I found a copy of an autobiography I had written in 1952 when I applied for enrollment in the Estonian Agricultural Academy.² I had just graduated from high school in the city of Viljandi, in Pärnu *oblast*, and I wanted to continue my studies in Tartu *oblast*.³ To enroll in university it was not enough to successfully pass the entrance examinations; one's parents also had to be loyal to the Soviet government. Thus I wrote in my autobiographical report that the size of our farm was only 14 hectares, and that we had never used hired help. At that time my father was in a forced labor camp in Vorkuta. Accordingly, I wrote that we had been living apart from Father since 1943, and that there were thus no family members who had been punished by the Soviet regime. Further, no one among our close

¹ The reader should not confuse this mainland village with the much larger town of the same name on the island of Saaremaa.

² This is a reference to the *anketa* (see Glossary).

³ Pärnu and Tartu *oblast*: in 1950, the administrative-territorial divisions of Estonia were redrawn by the Soviet regime. The contrast can be seen in the terminology of the first and second paragraphs of Asta Luksepp's life story.

relatives had been in the German army or belonged to any German organizations. In reality Father had been in the Home Guard, and two of my uncles had been in the Home Guard as well as the German army.⁴ One uncle and several relatives were living abroad—again a fact that I denied. After I had passed the examinations, I had to appear before the credentials committee. There they pored over my autobiography detail by detail, but I stuck to what I had written. I was sent out of the room while the committee deliberated. A little later I was called back into the room, and I was told I had been accepted into the Estonian Agricultural Academy. In March 1953, Papa Stalin died, and life started to get freer.

But now I must go back to my childhood, which coincided with the economic peak of the Estonian Republic. In my home, there was an attitude of deep respect toward the Estonian War of Independence. My father had fought in it, and my aunt Eliise had served as a nurse. The legacy of my childhood was reverence and love for my fatherland. Indeed, the song *Mu meelen kuldne kodukotus* (I remember the golden roof of my home) was written by one of my relatives, and the places mentioned there are from the area around my home.⁵ This became a popular song, and not even the occupying armies could keep people from singing it. It has been a strong moral support for me on my life journey. When I was a child, my father's mother Reet took care of me; she lived with us. Grandmother Reet's forebears on her father's side had been free peasants and had owned a mill.⁶ That was also the reason for the family name Veske. And so in my veins there flows a drop or two of free peasant's blood, and this has given me the courage to fight against injustice.

My father belonged to the Defense League and my mother to the Women's Auxiliary.⁷ In 1934 my father was elected chief magistrate of Tarvastu, and he held that office until 1940. Father also was on the board of the Tarvastu Farmers' Association,⁸ as well as its last president. He taught us that one has to know how to stand up for oneself,

⁴ Home Guard (*Omakaitse*), see Glossary.

⁵ Andres Rennit and the song *Mu meelen kuldne kodukotus*, see Hilja Lill's life story.

⁶ Free peasants (*vabad talupojad*), see Glossary.

⁷ Defense League (*Kaitseliit*) and Women's Auxiliary (*Naiskodukaitse*), see Glossary.

⁸ Farmers' Association (*Põllumeeste Selts*), see Glossary.

and have the courage to speak out for what one believes. He often provoked me to argue with him, to develop my abilities to express myself.

Life went on, and then, suddenly, the danger of war was in the air. In autumn 1939 foreign troops established bases on our soil, and in June 1940 came the change of regime. Life went downhill again. While he had been chief magistrate, Father had organized the building of a new schoolhouse for the Ämmuste elementary school. In 1940, I began school in that schoolhouse. The previous fall I had attended the school unofficially, to get used to things. I liked going to school very much. I was familiar with the school system under the Estonian Republic. I also enjoyed the Home Daughters' gatherings and events.⁹ Now I had to begin school in entirely different circumstances. The Home Daughters and the Young Eagles' organizations had been abolished; instead there were Young Pioneers and October Children. The children's sense of justice was completely violated. In protest, a group of pupils sang the Estonian national anthem on the way home from school, but some local communist overheard them, and they had to face a great deal of trouble at school. The teachers did not dare leave the children unpunished. As winter turned to spring, rumors began to spread that Germany might come and save us from the communist regime. I remember taking my mother's German textbook and starting to learn German on my own. Then came 14 June.¹⁰ I could feel that something bad was going to happen. It was feared that there would be mass arrests of the men. My father left home. In the morning we discovered that whole families were being sent to Siberia. A truck with deporters in it made a stop at the end of our road, but luckily it drove on.

Then came the day when Germany declared war on the Soviet Union. On Victory Day,¹¹ 1942 the War of Independence Memorial was rededicated in Tarvastu. I can remember that day very vividly, since I stood in the honor guard near the statue. This was a pleasant experience. Our blue-black-and-white flags were flying again. In the summer of 1943 all of the schoolchildren from the township of

⁹ Home Daughter's (*Kodutütred*), along with the parallel organization for boys, the Young Eagles (*Noorkotkad*), was a patriotic Estonian youth organization with more of a national focus than the international Boy and Girl Scouts. (See Glossary.) For October Children and Young Pioneers, see Leida Madison's life story.

¹⁰ The deportation of 14 June 1941, see Glossary.

¹¹ Victory Day (*Võidupüha*), the 23rd of June, see Glossary.

Tarvastu gathered on Citadel Hill, where national festivities were held. I remember we held hands in a circle and sang “Guarding the Beauty of the Fatherland” (*Isamaa ilu hoieldes*),¹² and vowed to love and defend our homeland.

In 1944 the Germans fled, and the Red Army had already reached the Narva River. It was feared that once again we would fall under Soviet power. My parents decided that if the situation got critical, we would have to leave our homeland behind. Even though we had plans to flee west, the winter grain was planted. The day came when we loaded our possessions on a wagon with a team of three horses, and we stepped out of our yard. I took a few handfuls of earth along from our garden. We never got to the shore, because the front passed right over us on the way, and once again we were in the clutches of an occupying army. Our friends in Tallinn, with whom we were going to flee, escaped at the last possible minute. We got as far as my aunt’s farm and took shelter there. Father and Mother hid in the loft of the stable. One day they told me that they would never turn themselves over to the Russians and that my aunt would raise me. Every now and then I recall that tragic conversation. Luckily they never acted on this intention, and we turned ourselves around and went back home.

Life was peaceful at first. But soon the arrests began. They came for Father, too, but luckily he escaped. That was the beginning of his life as a Forest Brother.¹³ The destruction battalion¹⁴ men prowled around, on the lookout for him. I remember that one night Mother and I were sitting at the table. We looked out the window and saw the men coming. My hands shook so much I could not lift my spoon to my mouth.

The school year began that fall around the 1st of November, I think. It was the 1940 situation all over again. Religious instruction was replaced by worship of the Soviet Union and Papa Stalin. Again we were forced to be Young Pioneers. They started making lists of “accomplices of the occupation,” and my parents were among them. Mother quickly began hauling whatever possessions she could from

¹² In Asta Luksepp’s story, one of the narrative strategies, in keeping with its ideological tenor, is referring to patriotic rituals and popular songs—most of them patriotic or referring to the homeland.

¹³ Forest Brothers—armed bands of partisan resisters, see Glossary.

¹⁴ Destruction battalion, see Glossary.

home to a safe hiding place. I helped her as much as I could. One day they came to take inventory of our property. Mother told me to drive the two pigs away from home to pasture, and so we were able to keep them. All of our property was handed over to a man from Paistu township. That man had shot someone back in 1941. This new owner¹⁵ of our farm had been described as a village drunk and rowdy. The fruits of my parents' hard work were turned over to the likes of these! Since my father was a Forest Brother, they tried to take my mother hostage. She started sending me away from home, to stay with my aunt and my grandparents. I remember that once I had to leave home after nightfall. It was a ten kilometer walk, and I was panic-stricken. I was very afraid of the dark, but I had to go. Attending school also became impossible, and Mother took me out of school. Linda and Ants Simm¹⁶ hid me for a while. They were living in the country at the time, on their farm, which was close to my grandparents' home. It was good to be with the Simms. They had a big library, and I was able to pass the time reading. They told me many interesting things about their lives. In the evening when it got dark, they would take me out for a walk.

The sixth of April 1945 was a tragic day for our family. The destruction battalion men caught my father. He was tried on 29 September 1945. By the verdict of the military court of the Estonian SSR People's Commissariat for Interior Matters, Father was sentenced to 20 years of imprisonment with confiscation of all of his property. He was first sent to Vologda, and later to the Komi Autonomous SSR, to the Vorkuta prison camp. After Father's arrest, Mother left home one spring night with a little bundle and the farm dog, and went to live with her parents. I was already there waiting for her. My grandparents were deprived of their second farm, which had a lovely copse of birch trees, almost like a park. The "new landowner" started chopping down the prettiest birches for firewood. In the spring when the sap started to flow, I saw the weeping stumps of the birch trees.

In fall 1945 I was enrolled in the fifth grade at the Viljandi Education Association Girls' High School at that time referred to as High

¹⁵ One of the "new landowners"—see Glossary.

¹⁶ Ants Simm (1877–1946) well-known Estonian public figure from Tarvastu; actor, director of the Vanemuise Theatre in Tartu 1906–21, Mayor of Tartu 1919–20.

School No. 1.¹⁷ My new classmates were all strangers, and it took some time to make friends. No one made any trouble for me about my parents' background. A few years later my mother came to Viljandi to live, and got a job as a weaver. Before the war she had done some weaving whenever she could spare some time from the farmwork. Now she could earn her living by it. Our only contact with Father was through letters, and these were infrequent.

I was young and longed to have fun. Unfortunately, there were so many tragic events that had caused us pain and anxiety. At the end of 1948 there was a major round of arrests among Viljandi schoolchildren. Ten young men and two girls, all in their last year of high school, as well as one teacher had to bid their freedom farewell. They were all accused of participating in a ceremony to bless the school pins, which bore the school insignia. There was also a resistance organization in the Boys' High School.

The formation of collective farms soon began in the countryside. In the summer of 1950 my aunt and grandmother were classified as *kulaks*.¹⁸ We wanted to save whatever we could of what was ours. I was spending my school holidays in the country. We made a deal with a truck driver we knew, piled everything we could on the truck, and took it to the home of one of our relatives. Luckily we were able to finish the job before the inventory officials came. On 1 October 1950, my aunt and grandmother had to leave their home behind and flee like robbers. We left in silence, and the darkness hid the tears in our eyes. Grandmother was 67 years old at the time. She had begun her life together with my grandfather with two bare, hard-working hands. Prosperity had come with hard work, and now this was brutally taken away from them. Grandmother and her son Ernst went to live in Tartumaa. My aunt and my grandmother had helped me a great deal. And now they were no longer there to help. I got a job as a weaver, and continued my studies in night school. In 1952 I graduated from high school and came to Tartu to study agronomy. Luckily, I was eligible for a scholarship, which helped me make ends meet. Mother got a job and a little room in Elva. There was the constant threat of someone informing on me and of being ex-matriculated because of my parents. In

¹⁷ Education Association (*haridusseltsid*), see Glossary (renaming of schools under Soviet rule).

¹⁸ Collectivization of Estonian agriculture, see Glossary.

those days there were several students from Tarvastu township at the Estonian Agricultural Academy. To this day I am grateful to them for not informing on me.

In 1955 my father came back home. Our first meeting took place in Tartu. It was a happy day: my father had been able to survive those ten horrendously difficult years. In the beginning he was forbidden to change his place of residence, and was only allowed to live in the Viljandi *raion*.¹⁹ Later he and Mother lived in Elva, and he went back and forth to help his sister out. His greatest wish was to get his own farm back at Mäksa. But Father died on 31 December 1959, and we buried him at the Tarvastu cemetery. I was 27 years old then; we had only been able to live together for a few years, and thus my mourning was very deep. On 31 March 1957 I graduated from university. My parents' wish to provide me with higher education had come true.

I was assigned to work in the "Victory" *kolkhoz* in the *raion* of Elva. The collective farm was small and wretched. The previous year I had done my practicum in the Kureküla *sovhoz*, which was quite prosperous. There I got good practical work experience which helped me as I began my work as an agronomist. My efforts met with some success, since in those days they began subsidizing the agricultural sector. With the 1956 Hungarian uprising, other things became clear—there would be no "white ship," and the western nations would not help us free ourselves from the communist regime.²⁰ By that time the regime itself had been considerably weakened. I remember that in the first year I could not tell the hayfields apart by type of seed, since they were all in miserable shape. Five years later we were selling small quantities of hayseed to other *kolkhozes*. On 11 February 1959 I married Jaan Luksepp. In 1962 the *kolkhoz* was merged with the Aakre *kolkhoz*. We got new jobs

¹⁹ Soviet administrative district, see Glossary.

²⁰ The "white ship" is a trope for the persistent hope in the Estonian countryside in the late 1940s that the Allies would come and liberate the Baltic states from Soviet rule. The trope has a longer history, referring back to the case of popular Moravian Brethren preacher Juhan Leinberg, who, in the 1860s promised to take his people to the Promised Land in Russia, and asked them to wait on the cliffs of the north coast of Estonia for him to return for them in a "white ship." Leinberg was the prototype for Eduard Vilde's novel *Prohvet Maltsvet* (1905–1908). See also Introduction, on Gustav Malts' autobiography, an important resource for Vilde's novel, and one of the first full-length autobiographical narratives in the Estonian language.

in the same region, at the Erumäe *kolkhoz*, where my husband became the director and I the zoological technician (*zootehnik*). These were the “golden” sixties. Life became more and more normal with each year. We tried to improve our financial situation. As my husband and I were lead workers at the *kolkhoz*, our wages were quite good. But to supplement our income we had to raise livestock and grow vegetables. There was work to keep us busy from early morning until late at night. In 1964 we bought a house in Elva.

At that time there were many *kolkhoz* workers who came from farm families, older people, who worked very hard and conscientiously. The prices paid for agricultural products were reasonable, which made it possible to build new production buildings and buy new equipment. Working conditions improved, and wages rose every year. We switched from workday quotas to cash wages. At the end of the year we were able to pay out bonuses. But despite all this we were constantly living in the crosswinds of Party politics. At the end of the 1960s there were massive mergers of *kolkhozes*. This was justified to some extent: if the *kolkhoz* was small and not doing very well, it was not possible to manage it optimally. The downside was that if the result of the merger was too large a farm, it could not be managed normally, either. They even tried to merge some *kolkhozes* with *sovhozes*. In the *kolkhozes* the workers’ collective retained some power to make decisions, but a *sovhoz* was completely nationalized. These political crosswinds did not leave the Erumäe *kolkhoz* untouched. In 1971 three *kolkhozes*—Erumäe, Vellavere, and Konguta were merged into a single unit, the Aru *kolkhoz*. By 1973 it had become a 10,000 hectare giant. The new *kolkhoz* had economic difficulties, as well as major internal conflict in the governing board. At first things went smoothly, but later management difficulties began to emerge. Progress slowed to a halt, and the *kolkhoz* went bankrupt.²¹

One cannot say that people lived poorly in those days. The more enterprising folks kept livestock and tilled their small garden plots. One had to work hard, of course, but it paid off. In our *kolkhoz* there was a labor shortage: many of the young people had left the countryside over the years, and older people were beginning to retire. Workers had to be brought in from outside. In those days they were putting up many

²¹ Compare these circumstances with Valter Lehtla’s life story.

apartment buildings in the countryside, so they could provide potential workers with housing. The new buildings had all the comforts, but there was minimal privacy for households. A great migration began in the countryside. There was a great shortage of labor, and since good workers were hard to find, we had to hire all sorts of drunks and other losers. Government pressure was heavy, and every year they demanded more and more milk and meat. We had to produce it at whatever price it took. The *lumpen* left behind filthy apartments, wrecked tractors, and cows with spoiled udders. In those days up to a fifth of the labor pool changed each year.

In the 1970s, in Estonia, Finnish saunas were springing up all over the place like mushrooms after the rain. They had a practical economic purpose. In those days all kinds of means of production were in short supply. One had to be on good terms with the officials in charge of distributing deficit goods. I, too, sometimes participated in setting a good table at a sauna party and cleaning up afterwards. Once they were expecting a visit to the region from high officials from Tallinn. One of the agricultural managers had given orders to his driver to take him home from the party at the right time, leaving the driver in a predicament, since this fellow had decided to continue partying. The driver asked us for help. We tempted the man into the car to drink cognac, and the plan worked. The driver took off quickly, with his boss and the cognac bottle in the car. Another time the regional bosses got the bright idea of taking an aerial view of their area. They hired a helicopter and circled in the air above the region. Later the helicopter brought the whole crew to our *kolkhoz*' famous sauna.

In Konguta I worked as a zoological technician. Beginning in 1983 I took the job of an economist. Changing jobs worked in my favor. The work was interesting. I held the database for the whole *kolkhoz* in my hands, and had to carry out all kinds of financial analyses. In addition, new contacts developed with economists from neighboring *kolkhozes*.

My uncle, Elmar Lamson, who lives in Sweden, sent me an invitation to visit him. The complicated bureaucratic procedures began. On 14 June 1988 I began my journey in Tallinn on the *Georg Ots*, to Helsinki, and on from there to Stockholm. I was in the free world for the first time in my life, and was reunited with my uncle, whom I had not seen for 44 years.

On 14 August 1987, Harri Haamer,²² pastor of my home church for many years, was buried in Tarvastu. It was a lovely summer day. The church was packed with people; there may have been a few thousand of them. Uno Lamp, son of a War of Independence officer from Konguta came to the funeral with flowers tied together with a blue-black-and-white ribbon. This was the first time the colors of our flag were out in public again. Though we were burying a freedom fighter, our hope of becoming free again was reborn. This was followed a few weeks later by the mass demonstration in Deer Park in Tallinn, but I did not participate. A new era was beginning in Estonia, and I consider it to be the best chapter of my life. In September we gathered at the Tallinn Song Festival Pavilion, and the festival “Song of Estonia 1988” was held. We were all united by the dream of freedom. Thousands of people held blue-black-and-white flags in their hands. It was like a spring torrent, which had burst out from behind a dam. It was also a hopeful sign that the Estonian Communist Party was led by Vaino Väljas, who had spent long years as Soviet ambassador to Nicaragua. I liked the heartfelt speeches V. Väljas made to the public, in excellent Estonian. In November the Estonian SSR Supreme Soviet held a session, where they ratified the declaration of independence. The session was also broadcast on television, and I watched it with great interest. Just before 24 February 1989 we issued a decree that those working on that day were to be paid double wages, as on a national holiday. On the morning of that memorable day we gathered and raised our beloved blue-black-and-white flag. Then I went back home. My husband and I continued on to the Tarvastu cemetery to visit the graves of our loved ones. I lit some candles, and we sat there in quiet devotion, remembering the old times. My father, aunt, and great-uncle had fought in the War of Independence. After the trip to the cemetery we went to my godfather’s birthday celebration. He was turning eighty. In high spirits we drove through our homeland, and everywhere the flags were flying.

We attended many events, demonstrations, and public meetings in those days. From the *sovhoz* we were able to get a bus for free, and there were always plenty of passengers. On 25 June 1989, a monument

²² Harri Haamer (1906–1987), legendary Lutheran pastor and before the war a popular scout leader in Tartu. After eight years in the Siberian camp on the Koloma peninsula he was pastor of the Tarvastu congregation in central Estonia near Viljandi.

to President Konstantin Päts²³ was dedicated at Tahkuranna. I went there, too, and took along a busload of co-workers. We were not sure whether all of this was happening while we were awake or in a dream. Earlier in my life, I had always had great respect for President K. Päts, whose roots are also in the earth of my dear Mulgimaa.²⁴ At that commemoration, I saw Enn Tarto²⁵ for the first time. I had no idea then that our paths would soon begin to cross regularly.

In July 1989 we convened the organizing meeting of the Citizens' Committees. This was work with a purpose. We began registering Estonian citizens. I had registered myself on 25 June in Tahkuranna. The work of the Citizens' Committees kept on picking up momentum. I was selected to represent Puhja parish in the Tartu district organization, and ongoing ties were formed. The district headquarters were headed by Kalle Jürgenson and Viktor Niitsoo, and the Tartu city headquarters by Enn Tarto. On 23 August, the 50th anniversary of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, the “Baltic Chain” was organized. I was in charge of organizing transportation for people from Konguta. There were many who wanted to go, and we had three busloads in all. That was the limit, as the *sovhoz* could not give us any more vehicles. Before leaving I stopped by at home and adjusted the radio to the right wavelength for my mother. We gathered on the market square in Elva and then the long line of cars moved on toward Karksi-Nuia. It was unbelievable how many cars were heading for the Baltic Chain,²⁶ and there were traffic jams. Before getting to Nuia, our line of cars was redirected to the Ruhja road, heading toward Latvia. Our assigned place in the chain was between Nuia and Viljandi. We kept driving toward Latvia until it was 7 o'clock. We stopped the buses and joined other folks from Võrumaa. There were so many people that we could not fit in one line, so we formed parallel chains. We were all moved to tears. We had radios along, and thus could follow the orders coming from

²³ Konstantin Päts, see Glossary.

²⁴ Popular name for Viljandimaa, where some of the most prosperous farms were located during the Estonian Republic. Here one can also see Asta Luksepp reverting to the territorial-administrative divisions of pre-Soviet, republic-era Estonia. Asta Luksepp's story follows the ideological trajectory that the Singing Revolution and the events of 1988–1991 constituted the “restitution” and “restoration” of the “real” Estonian republic.

²⁵ Enn Tarto was a political dissident (see Valter Raudvassar's life story).

²⁶ Baltic Chain, 1989, and Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, see Glossary.

Tallinn. We passed along the word “freedom.” Then we moved on to the Estonian–Latvian border. The roads were clogged with cars and we moved at the speed of pedestrians. The Latvians had carried armloads of *gladioli* to the borders, and between the flowers there were thousands of lighted candles. I, too, put a lit candle down to commemorate the years of suffering. At the border there were speeches, and rulers of the occupying regime were burned in effigy. It was very late at night when we got home. My mother opened the door for me for the last time. I told her that I would tell her about everything the next day. But in the morning, when I went into her room, I found that she had passed away. For Mother, the moving and elated mood of the Baltic Chain had been too intense an experience. There was great joy in knowing that the years of suffering were coming to an end. Her heart was not able to withstand the strain, and it stopped in her 83rd year of life. Mother departed from this life as a happy woman, but she did not live to see what the new Estonian Republic would bring.

The struggle for liberation continued. My activities did not please the local communists. The *sovhoz* union committee president and some others began looking for reasons to fire me. But the opposite happened: the workers did not reelect her to run the union. In spring 1989 I was asked to help find information about former members of the Tarvastu Defense League, the Women’s Auxiliary,²⁷ and those who had fallen in the War of Independence. That was the beginning of my historical research, which has continued for many years. My collaboration with Enno Piir began around the same time. He initiated the campaign to gather information about the fate of those repressed during the years of occupation. I sent him information about my father and a few of my relatives. I was asked to help gather information about the whole township. The plan was to publish a multivolume work entitled *Sakalamaa will Never Forget*, organized according to parishes. Since I had a wide network of connections, and could remember quite a bit myself, I was fortunate to be able to gather a great deal of information about what had happened to the people in my township “in the labyrinths of history.” We got a great deal of help from Maimu Haamer, who looked things up in the church record books. The Tarvastu volume of the book was published in 1995, and in it there are 40 entries for my relatives. I kept up a correspondence with Piir for many years, and visited

²⁷ Defense League, Women’s Auxiliary, see Glossary.

him as well. He is an extraordinary person, who has done a great deal to record the sufferings of the Estonian people. Around this time it became possible to finish many things that had been interrupted years earlier. For example, when I was at the right age to go to confirmation, it was not possible. In those days I was attending the Tarvastu church half-secretly. Then came the year 1990, and I found out that they were holding confirmation classes for older people at the Tarvastu church. On 25 August I stood with the others at the church altar. I was blessed by Eenok Haamer. It was all very moving.

In the meantime, I continued working at the Konguta *sovhoz*. A new farm law went into effect, and those who wished could start keeping their own farms. This was the right thing to do, since it was cheaper to get a farm going during the ruble era. However, in the collective farm people started stealing property. There was no order in the state anymore, and the official auditors had been sent packing. Agriculture started to go downhill, and things in Konguta were not in good shape, either. A band of thieves had sprung up, and many of the leading workers were among them. They started stealing all kinds of property. With some like-minded people we decided to form a commission to recover the stolen property at the annual meeting of the union in November 1990. The commission tried to carry on its work, and it had the people's support. But some of those in charge and the head of the village soviet had a negative attitude. We turned to the parliament to get some help, and through an intermediary the information reached the prime minister. We did not get any help, however. I was released from my duties at the *sovhoz* on 1 August 1991, three weeks before the restoration of the Estonian Republic. I was now a pensioner, and could devote myself completely to the work of restoring Estonian Independence. In the 1990s the auditorium of the Agricultural College (formerly the Defense League building) was the venue for many discussion evenings. Many of my former professors and fellow students participated. This was the time of property- and land reform. At the meetings we attempted to put pressure on politicians to make laws that would serve the people's interests. I also participated in the founding of the Landowners' Legal Forum, which was intended to put pressure on Parliament, the government, and local governments to provide legal advice for prospective landowners, and encourage them to share their experiences. On 12 April, 1992, men and women from all over Estonia gathered to reestablish the Farmer's Union party. I, too, found that this

party was closest in principles to my own, and decided to join. In Tallinn, on 13 November 1997, we celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Women's Auxiliary of the Defense League. For the first time after the occupation, Women's Auxiliary Orders of Merit were awarded. I was given highest honors—my Order of Merit bears the number 1, and I was the first to receive it. In 1998 I was honored with the Defense League Medal of Merit, Class III. When helping restore the work of the Women's Auxiliary, I never thought about any remuneration. I was only thinking about what my people needed.

Most of my life's journey is behind me. The turn of the millennium is at the door. I hope that I can step through it, and that there is still some road ahead of me. Our generation's portion was a heavy load of sufferings, but we were not constantly bent down under the burden. When it was possible, we celebrated, enjoyed ourselves, loved, and created families; if it was possible, we studied. When our homes were taken away, we were able to build new ones years later. The children of today, including those among my relatives, will now begin shaping Estonia after their own image. I hope that our polluted homeland will become beautiful again.



Heljo Liitoja

BORN 1923

I was born on 7 February in Tartu, as the first child in my family. My mother and father were both teachers. I lived in Tartu until I was 13. Then my father changed jobs and the family moved to Tallinn.

What do I remember about those Tallinn years? I could easily fill twenty pages just with those memories. But that would not be a life story. As I sift through my memory fragments, what rises

to the top is not so much what happened, but my thoughts, feelings, wishes, and longings. What surprises me even more is that most of my wishes from that time have come true, much later than I expected, and not quite in the way I imagined it. This confirms the proposition that we so eagerly defended in philosophy class: the broad outlines of a human life are drawn by the place and time of one's birth, and the characteristics and abilities one is born with, but filling them in is largely in one's own power.

An important factor in my life story was my poor health. It seemed I caught every bug that was going around, and spent countless days and weeks in bed with one illness or another. When I entered school and filled out the health forms, I had to underline almost all the listed illnesses, except for meningitis.

I also remember that ever since I was little, older people kept saying with regret, "Too bad that child won't last very long, she's a smart one."

Consciously or unconsciously, perhaps I was in a hurry to take in as much of life as I could while there was still time. Whenever I got well enough to get out of bed, I had to catch up with everything I had missed. I worked up a sweat, and then all it took was a slight breeze to

land me back in bed again. Being in bed was boring, whether at home or in hospital, since the means of entertaining myself were limited. When I had memorized every last detail of the pictures in my picture books, I began taking an interest in the little squiggles in the captions. Soon I knew my alphabet, and since Estonian is a phonetic language, it did not take long to figure out that M-U-N-A meant “egg” in Estonian, and K-A-N-A stood for the bird that produced it.

I remember that I was given a spelling book (*aabits*) for my fourth birthday. My proud father had me read out loud to the guests, and since the general consensus was that I had a “good head,” there was a suspicion that I was reciting from memory. One of the uncles picked up the newspaper *Postimees* from the table, and, smiling triumphantly, told me to read from it. The printed letters were a little different from the ones in my books, but seeing the man’s mocking face, I tried very hard and read fluently: it was Father’s turn for a triumphant smile.

My parents thought it was a good thing for a child to learn another language besides her mother tongue. To this end a German lady was hired, whose patient coaching resulted in my learning how to read in German at age six. I read everything I could get my hands on: popular science books from the Loodus publishing house’s Golden Series that my father brought from his Põhjala fraternity library,¹ children’s books from the German library, signs in shop windows, magazines, and newspapers. My reading appetite was huge.

But because of my ongoing poor health, it was recommended that I wait until age 8 to begin my schooling. When that time came, there was nothing left for me to learn in the first or the second grade, and the school board approved the decision to enroll me in the third grade. I became a celebrity overnight: during recess the pupils in other classes whispered, “that’s the girl who...” As the youngest in the class, I had some special privileges. I was also often the one chosen to perform at school parties and convocations, and who was offered parts in plays.

I had sometimes thought I wanted to become a washerwoman or a farmer’s wife when I grew up, but now, having tasted the sweetness of applause, I dreamed of a career as an actress. Later on, when

¹ Põhjala university students’ association; a coeducational fraternal society for university students.

I discovered that I would rather give the orders than carry them out, I changed my mind many times from theatre director to teacher and kindergarten teacher. When I began receiving praise for my school essays, of course I reconsidered, and wanted to become a writer. It went without saying that I would attend university, especially considering the academic inclinations of my parents and other relatives. I also wished I had been born a boy, particularly when the winds of war were blowing across our homeland: as a girl I could not rise up to defend it, weapon in hand. But what I wanted above all else was to become a mother. In high school I would announce to my mother from time to time that when I graduated, I would have a child. Years later I heard from one of mother's friends that she had been worried about my making her a grandmother too early. What she did not know, of course, was that as yet I had no idea where children came from. I will come to the reasons a bit later in this story.

I went down in the history of the Tartu Elementary School No 9 not only for entering the third grade at the age of eight, but for three poor grades in fourth grade: penmanship, deportment, and needlework. In those days there only were three grades in elementary school: 2, 3, 4). I finished elementary school with summer catch-up work in needlework.

I continued my studies in the Tartu Girls' High School, where without particular effort I found myself a secure position among my classmates, older students, and teachers.

All of that came to an abrupt end when my father, who had been teaching Estonian and Latin at the Tartu Treffner Gymnasium, accepted a position in Tallinn, teaching those same languages at the French Lycée and the English College. Naturally, the whole family moved with him. The children had to go to a new school. My brother enrolled in the French Lycée, and my sister and I in the Tallinn Gymnasium I (later called High School No. 3). For me this was a terrible trauma. From the hothouse environment in Tartu, where I had been treated with special, loving care as a rare plant, I found myself in totally new surroundings, where no one seemed to realize how special I was. On top of that, this was the capital city, where everything was very different from the homier, more accepting atmosphere of Tartu. The fact that I was two years younger than everyone else was not to my advantage; it only intensified my sense of backwardness.

After all, many of my classmates had curls, silk stockings, even high-heeled shoes. My hair was totally straight, and I wore thick, cotton stockings and low-heeled shoes that fastened with a buttoned strap so they would stay on. Perhaps there were others, too, without the curls and silk stockings, but I did not see them. I longed to be accepted by the “ladies” society. My age, which until that point had expanded my range of opportunities in school, was now a millstone around my neck. Of course it was anathema to show my total ignorance concerning the opposite sex. During recess, I was the first to laugh at off-color jokes, even though I really did not understand much of anything. The others developed a certain respect for me, since I seemed to be very knowledgeable about “those things.” Of course I did not dare ask questions. This gap in my knowledge of “those certain things” later caused my mother a good many gray hairs.

Meanwhile, I had discovered that a well-placed snide remark would evoke general laughter and liven up a boring lesson. The class would begin to chuckle expectantly whenever I was called to the blackboard. If, at the beginning of the school year I had retreated to the coat room during long recess to cry, and sent long tear-soaked letters to Tartu, by spring I had my own secure niche among the class elite, and I was never to lose it.

In retrospect, I think my clowning around came from my overflowing *joie de vivre*, from boredom, and simply because there were opportunities for it. The popularity was icing on the cake. Most of the pranks were innocent and trivial, but from time to time I would cross the line. In those days in Estonia there was an unwritten rule that children of schoolteachers were treated in a way to spare their parents hassle: such a child’s parents would be summoned to sign an agreement that they would remove the child from the school themselves if there were any more pranks that semester. There would be no formal expulsion. The parent who came to school about me was always my mother. Father, who referred to me proudly as “his daughter” whenever I did something positive, refused to “own” me when I was, once again, threatened with expulsion. The following semester I would conduct myself more or less appropriately, only to begin all over again shortly after.

In addition to my tendency to cause trouble, I was often absent from school due to my continued ill health. I had weak lungs, causing me to run a constant lowgrade fever, and was anemic to boot. For the

whole time I was in school, I was excused from physical education. During my last year of school, I was also spared singing, needlework, home economics, drawing, and catechism, in other words, all possible subjects that did not jeopardize getting a diploma. When exempted, I would lie down on the couch in the doctor's room; sitting for five to six hours at a stretch in the classroom would have overtaxed my strength. I was also able to make use of this privilege strategically when I was late for school. Instead of going into the classroom, I would head for the doctor's room, and spend the first lesson resting there. In the class diary, they would mark me absent, which looked much better on the report card than tardiness.

Meanwhile momentous events were taking place, with implications for the lives of all Estonians. Estonia had "voluntarily" joined the family of the Soviet Union.² What affected me most as a student were changes in the curriculum. German and Latin disappeared; history was soon changed beyond recognition; there were no Christmas holidays. The hardest thing to accept was losing the freedom to express myself openly. When the opinions we exchanged among ourselves reached the teacher's ears, it was clear that there was an informer in the class. With this came the recognition that our class was a microcosm of the people as a whole. This gave rise to a tormenting rage at the regime that in such a short time had turned our happy, convivial student body into a group of young people who shot suspicious glances at each other.

When war broke out between the Soviet Union and Germany, it was altogether natural that I wished I was a boy who could go to war to free the country from its oppressive chains.

It was a coincidence—or maybe even fate that handed me an opportunity to make my contribution. My parents had reason to think they would be among those deported, and so it seemed wiser not to live together as a family in the same apartment. We each headed to the home of different relatives outside of Tallinn. Only my father remained behind, to attend to his work responsibilities, but even he no longer lived at our former address.

I was sent to the county of Järvamaa, where we had relatives in several villages. When the front reached our village of Ees-Võõbuse, and the Russians were driven out, young men emerged from the woods who had been hiding there out of fear of being mobilized. They were

² The events of June 1940, see Glossary.

burning with the desire to chase the oppressors out of the country once and for all, by force. Since they knew the area well, the German battalion stationed in the area would have been glad to accept them into their ranks, but unfortunately the boys did not know any German. I had already drawn attention to myself during the battle by crawling across a bare field under crossfire to tell the Germans where the Russians had hidden their mines. It was a foregone conclusion that I was asked to come along as an interpreter. Despite my aunt's attempts to talk me out of it, I happily agreed. And so I marched along with the Estonian company of the German army. My primary duties were to relay the German orders to the Estonians. From time to time I also took part in reconnaissance missions, in a team made up of two Estonians and two Germans.

In the meantime the Erna battalion had arrived at the Kautla bog, and marched on from there toward Tallinn. Their headquarters were now in a nearby manor. (I think it was Kose-Uuemõisa, but my memory may be playing tricks on me.) Our battalion was also on its way there, and they were immediately added to the Erna list.³ Now the question arose of what to do with me. Clearly they no longer needed an interpreter, since among the boys who had returned from Finland⁴ there were many whose knowledge of German at least matched mine. The German signal officer, Kurt Reinhardt, was of the firm belief that women lowered military morale, and that I needed to be sent home. The Estonian officers tried to explain to him that this would be very unfair, since I had helped them out. It was generally known that the woods were full of Red Army deserters, and thus it would be extremely dangerous for a young girl to travel eighteen kilometers alone.

For the time being my fate was left up in the air. The whole battalion stayed on for several days at the manor. I tried to make myself useful in every possible way. When marching orders came, I was summoned before First Lieutenant Reinhardt, who apologized for having had his doubts about me. He said he had been watching me, and had concluded that not only did I not lower military morale, but actually raised it! And so I was officially enlisted as a private in the Erna battalion, 1st company, and added to the pay sheet. I was entrusted with a

³ Erna battalion, see Glossary.

⁴ "Finnish Boys," see Glossary.

machinegun, and later, when my disintegrating sandals were replaced by boots, stored a few hand grenades in them. My brothers-at-arms taught me how to use them, but I never needed them.

In the Erna ranks I participated in the liberation of Tallinn. I would have gone on to Saaremaa, where the battalion was headed next, but my father, who had fought in the same regiment with battalion commander Colonel Kurg, in the War of Independence, used his connections to demand my release from the army. Since I was underage, neither I nor the Colonel could argue with him.

Later on, Colonel Kurg looked me up to help with the disbanding of the Erna battalion. Some time after that he helped me get a job on the kitchen staff of the Paldiski prisoner-of-war quarantine camp. There were over 5,000 Russian prisoners of war from Russia being held there: at 19, I knew no more about food supply than a pig knew about spoons, but I was appointed the head of food distribution. Spotted fever (typhus) was raging there.

I managed, but at the price of my health. I soon realized that I would not last very long there. However, since the job was listed as of military importance, one could only get out of it by continuing one's education or enlisting in the army. To get into university, one first had to go through *Arbeitsdienst* (labor service), in which I had no interest whatsoever.⁵ My father came to my aid, and found out that the Institute of Social and Home Economics was on the list of institutions of higher learning, but *Arbeitsdienst* was not an entrance requirement. And so I became a student at the Institute in the social sciences branch. Though in the beginning I had planned to use the school only to escape the POW quarantine camp, and leave after a few weeks, I soon realized that I had found a new interest, and leaving was out of the question.

A year later, however, I was in Germany, earning my living as a maid and *au pair* worker. Meanwhile Lieutenant Reinhardt had been promoted to the rank of captain, and was at the front. I had been corresponding with him, and when I complained that I could not continue my studies because I had not done *Arbeitsdienst*, he had me send him my identity numbers and other data. Soon I was invited to speak with the dean of Berlin University. There I heard that due to my "prior

⁵ *Reichsarbeitsdienst* was a prerequisite for enrollment in university (see Glossary).

service” in the German army, I was exempted from *Arbeitsdienst*, and the doors of Berlin University were open to me.

A new obstacle arose when they discovered that my final report card, embellished with hammer and sickle, was marked high school instead of gymnasium, as that institution was referred to at that time. Also there were no indications that I knew German or Latin, since these subjects had been erased from the curriculum during my last year. There was no choice but to go through the so-called “immatriculation course.”

I was able to complete this course by the time the so-called *Totaler Arbeitseinsatz* was imposed in university, which meant that the only students allowed to attend university were those in their last year or war invalids. The others all had to go and dig trenches to impede the advances of the Red Army, which was already very close to Berlin.

I escaped this fate thanks to a fortunate accident. I had broken a bone in my right hand, which ruled out digging trenches, at least for the time being. The day the cast was removed at the university clinic, the Allies bombed downtown Berlin for the first time, in the middle of the day. For six hours I was in the university bomb shelter underneath the rubble, and when our turn came to be dug out, and I saw the light of day again, I realized that the whole square was surrounded by buildings in flames. I found a narrow little street, where the flames met above my head, but where the lower stories had not yet caught fire. The heat was enormous, the asphalt soft, but I got through there. Only my eyebrows and the soles of my shoes were scorched.

The Soviet troops were now quite close, and the Allied bombings continued day and night. Berlin was no longer a comfortable place to live. However, one could leave only with a special permit, which was also issued to eastern refugees. I obtained a refugee certificate from the Estonian Committee, and left Berlin. On the train I was allowed to take along only as much as I could carry. My right hand was still weak from the recent fracture. The wartime dress made from the thick fabric of my cousin’s winter coat now had to serve as a backpack.

With my pack on my back and a satchel on my arm holding my folk costume, and photographs and mementoes I had brought from home, I got on the southbound train. The wheels turned as long as there were tracks. Where the tracks had been destroyed, everyone picked up their bundles and walked along the railway until they found

intact tracks and a new train waiting. This way I eventually got to Munich, and went from there to Wörgel, in Tirol. Two classmates from the Home Economics Institute days were working in the local hospital. Kindly, they made room for me in their lodgings in a barracks, until I found myself a job as the childminder for a butcher's family.

Once, while out for a walk with the children, a German soldier with an amputated leg joined us. When he heard that I had interrupted my studies at Berlin University, he recommended that I try my luck at Innsbruck University. Even though the rules were the same as at Berlin University, he knew that they were not as strictly enforced. I took the advice, and soon I was a student at Innsbruck University. That did not last long, since bombs struck at that university, too. The war was ending, and Germany was twisted in a death agony. It seemed wiser to take refuge in some smaller place, and I ended up at Fügen, in Zillerthal, where I got a job in the kitchen of a knitting factory.

Meanwhile, the war had ended. The Allies divided both Germany and Austria among themselves, and Zillerthal was allotted to the American Zone.

Soon rumors spread that those Estonian refugees who could prove Swedish extraction, or who had close relatives there, could go to Sweden. My mother's cousin and his family were in Sweden, and I decided to try my luck, to see whether those delicate connections were enough. With my classmates from Wörgel I was soon on the train to Bregenz, there the sheep were separated from the goats. Since I had no way of proving where my close relatives from Sweden were living, I soon realized that the chances of getting to Sweden were practically zero.

After a variety of adventures, including a narrow escape from repatriation to the homeland, I found myself in a cattle car along with 27 compatriots, the youngest of which was a few weeks old, and two Danes. In our official letter of passage it was stated that we were Swedes, headed for Hamburg, where we would try to find a boat to Sweden.

To the chagrin of the Danes in our midst, whenever the train made a stop in a town with an Estonian refugee camp, our carriage would be unhitched and the Estonians would send representatives to check things out and ask whether there was any room in the camp. If there were none available, we had the car hitched to the next northbound train, and the trip continued.

At Celle there was room for all of us. We handed the letter of passage over to the Danes, and they traveled on. Our new home was the Celle Estonian Camp.

During my many wanderings I had spent my time amusing the bored children among us, playing and singing with them, and telling them stories. This came to the attention of the camp governing board. Since there were no professional elementary school teachers, and I had an obvious interest and ability with the children, I was offered the opportunity to organize and direct an Estonian school. I accepted, on condition that I would also be allowed to start a kindergarten in the afternoons. My proposal was accepted.

The next spring the camp moved to Wolterdingen, and merged with a Baltic Camp consisting of about 5,000 Latvians, 300 Lithuanians, and 150 Estonians. We lived in barracks, with designated rooms both for the kindergarten and the school. Life could go on.

In the meantime, academics who had escaped from the Baltic states had founded the Baltic University, and I faced a difficult choice: to continue my interrupted education or keep working with the children, whom I had grown quite fond of. I consulted with the governing board of the camp, and we found the golden mean. Since some people with youth work experience had arrived at the camp, we turned the school over, and two well-intentioned young women took over the kindergarten.

I began living a dual existence, cramming my lectures into four and a half days a week. On Friday evenings I got on the train to Wolterdingen, where a crowd of children would greet me at the camp gates. At eight o'clock I was already in the classroom, teaching English to beginners. After the lesson, there was dancing in the camp hall or in the village. On Saturdays and Sundays, I directed the work of the young girls who ran the kindergarten while I was in Hamburg. On Saturday evenings there would be a party or a smaller gathering, but on Monday morning at 6 AM I was already on the train to Hamburg.

When the Baltic University moved to Pinneberg the following year, I remained behind in Hamburg, continuing my studies at the Hamburg Hansa University, while continuing my former activities at the Wolterdingen camp. The food was miserable, and there was no proper winter clothing; the soles of the only shoes I had were worn through. The heating of the camp barracks was regulated from a distance, and since there were often power failures, one not only had to do without light,

but without heat as well. In addition to chronic bronchitis, I was often running a fever. When in April the cardiac inflammation I had suffered from in winter was followed by typhus, the doctor said that if I did not find better living circumstances, I would not live to see the next year.

In those days the first recruiters from foreign countries were making the rounds in the camps, in order to find cheap labor. When they announced that Canada was looking for cleaning ladies, I tried my luck. I filled out the forms, and wearing a decent outfit I had assembled from clothing borrowed from friends, I stepped into the room of the Canadian representative for my interview, which was very brief. After the gentleman had familiarized himself with my form, he said that Canada had no need for the likes of me—I was too highly educated, and would not last long as a cleaning lady; they needed people who would come to be cleaning ladies, and remain there permanently.

With somewhat bitter irony, I reflected on the fact that my obstacle was too much education. A few weeks later, another recruiter appeared. I could not change the information on the form, since they had kept a copy of it, but I adjusted my behavior. I gave an award-winning performance, hiding everything I had learned, and when they asked me what I wanted to do after the obligatory year as a cleaning lady was over, I asked with a frightened look on my face, did I really have to think about doing anything else? With a kind smile I was told that if I wanted to work as a cleaning lady for the rest of my life, no one would force me to do anything else.

I had passed the first test with flying colors, but more lay ahead. The camp doctor, whom I knew, issued a certificate that I was in good health. With this and with the lung X-ray I had borrowed from a classmate, I moved to the Fallingbostal transit camp, waiting for visits to a Canadian doctor and the consul.

Before I could see either of them, I got sick again, this time with a severe case of simple angina, and was put in the so-called “death chamber” of the camp hospital. Once again the proverb came true that the miserable one has a tough spirit. I came out of hospital, but I was so weak I could barely drag my feet. The word was that the Canadian doctor at that time would make everyone do at least ten squats. Once I squatted, I would not be able to get up again on my own strength. No one, myself included, really believed that I would pass the medical examination.

Was it fate or coincidence? Along the way I had taken a kindergarten teachers' course, and gone on to teach it. That same month YMCA and YWCA kindergarten teachers' days were being held at Fallingbostel, and I had already given my consent to lecture there. When the summons came to the Canadian doctor, it turned out that the appointment was scheduled for the same day as my lecture. The YMCA-YWCA director, who accompanied me to the doctor, saw to it that I was examined without waiting my turn in line. As a favor to his friend, the doctor only took a quick look inside my mouth, lifted my eyelids, and declared me to be in good health.

Meeting the Canadian consul was actually quite delightful. Apparently out of sheer joy of being able to converse with someone more or less freely in his mother tongue, he chatted with me about all sorts of things and then recommended most heartily that I continue my studies in Canada.

Thus in August 1948 I found myself on board a ship, carrying a suitcase with all my earthly possessions, and my satchel, which had accompanied me every step of the way since Berlin. The others were crying, but I stood there dry-eyed. I cried my own tears later, lying in my bunk as I heard the others squealing that Canada was already visible. Not until that moment that I was fully aware of how far away my homeland was.

I began my career as a maid in Toronto, which was of course a blessing. Here there were already many more Estonians than anywhere else in the free world. I spent my days off among them. I sang in the choir, danced folk dances, and belonged to Rein Andre's theatre troupe, but my main work was with Estonian children. At the request of Pastor Puhm, who had been my catechism teacher in the Tallinn high school, I organized the first Estonian children's Christmas party in December, complete with a little performance. That got me going again. When I asked Pastor Puhm whether it would be possible to find some rooms from time to time for the Estonian children to study, sing, and play, he replied, with a happy smile, that he had plans to start a Sunday school. Would I be willing to accept the director's position? I agreed on condition that in addition to the spiritual aspect, I would be able to spend some time with the children just singing and playing.

The Sunday School began on 16 January 1949 with 19 children. By spring the group of children had grown to 50, and an Estonian Her-

itage School had been begun in the church basement; the teachers had grown in numbers, as well.

In the fall the work continued with new momentum. Even though the Estonian Heritage School was now under the auspices of the Estonian Society, and scouting organizations had been established, there were still few places and occasions for Estonian boys and girls to gather. Most Estonians did not yet have the means to own cars, let alone summer cottages. Thus children were gladly brought to summer school. The activities were divided into three areas: children's choir practice, religious instruction, and games. There were several special events a year: a Christmas party in December, the anniversary of the founding of the Sunday School in January, the Mother's Day celebration in May, and the final convocation and outing in June.

Though I had many good helpers, the main responsibility was on my shoulders. During the year I had to think up several programs, the longest of which was at Christmas, when we always produced a pageant. I would use the limited materials available, which I copied when necessary, and if there was nothing else, I wrote the Christmas pageant myself. There were always as many as 50 roles, in order to allow as many children as possible to participate. The script included dances, singing, and lots of movement, in order to keep the young audience interested. From time to time I was fortunate enough to have skilled assistants in choreography, costumes, and stage decorations. I often accompanied musical pieces on the piano myself. Later I also took over the directing of the Sunday School choir, and started a percussion ensemble, which proudly wore their own uniforms.

It had always bothered me that Estonian Sunday schools were using English-language texts. I was also not very happy with the ways Scripture was explained to the children, particularly the fact that the word sin appeared several times over the course of each lesson. Over time I fell into the habit of translating the each Sunday's story into Estonian for each age group; I would copy it onto a stencil, duplicate it, and paste pictures cut out from the English Sunday School leaflet next to the text. I would also translate children's religious books into Estonian, typing the Estonian text onto a strip of paper and pasting it over of the English text. Gradually I developed a team of assistants for the typing and pasting-over, but the translation remained my own responsibility. In this way the Sunday School started its own library,

which included not only religious literature but children's books from the homeland. The latter I would put through censorship so to speak, so that there would not be words like "communism," "pioneer," *kolkhoz*, or other such references to the regime in the homeland. Talking about such things was taboo.

Sunday school work took up the bulk of my free time. One by one I let go of my other activities. After the Toronto Estonian Kindergarten was founded, I was the head music teacher for all of the children on Saturdays, from 1966–1972. When the three and four year-old group added a second, midweek meeting, I taught singing there as well, and was the teacher for the four-year-olds. I worked part-time in the office of the St. Peter's Church. In addition to everything, thanks to the effort and initiative of Merit Co., Toronto's Estonian children could listen to five children's LPs. I selected both the songs and the singers; rehearsals took place at my home, and I also provided the piano accompaniment.

My own private life took shape in parallel with my community work. I had to learn a trade. Since working with children suited me, I started looking around for opportunities to study to become an elementary school teacher. In those days teachers were trained at so-called Normal Schools. Considering my previous education, I was told it would take me a year to obtain a certificate. However, I was also informed that since I spoke English with an accent, I had no hope of getting a teaching position in Toronto, but had to content myself with a small rural school somewhere outside of the city.

Since by that time it was clear that Toronto would become the largest Estonian community outside Estonia, and I staunchly held on to my heritage, I gave up on studying to be a schoolteacher. I discovered that there were no such language restrictions for preschool teachers. Better yet, here it was possible to get a certificate through night school courses.

Thus I chose my path. Even before completing my certificate I was offered a job in a Toronto nursery school, and worked there until my son was born in 1954, and I stayed home. Financially it was a stretch, and we could really have used a second salary, but my husband and I were agreed that we could get everything else we needed later, but what a child missed out on during his or her first years could never be compensated.

After a long wait my second son was born in 1963. Despite my sincere joy in being a mother, and the fulfillment I got from working with Estonian children, I missed intellectual stimulation. This was the main reason I decided in 1964 to enroll in evening courses at the University of Toronto, and to continue my interrupted education. After the required courses were completed, I majored in sociology and psychology, and received my BA a few months before my 50th birthday.

In the meantime my marriage had fallen apart, and as soon as I was able to find a job, I moved out and began living on my own. I also quit all my positions in the Estonian community, and cut all my social ties. Once again, I began my life from zero.

This new beginning was far from easy. A year after starting to live on my own I had such a massive stroke that there was not much hope I would live. After some hesitation I agreed on an operation. It turned out that in addition to the aneurysm that had ruptured, there were other aneurysms in my head, and I was told that I had at most two and a half years to live, but only if I lived very cautiously, without stress and anxiety.

I was hospitalized for six weeks, and by the time I was released, the mild paralysis that followed the operation was resolved. My short-term memory had been affected, so much in fact that, though I mastered my own name and the name of the hospital, I had not succeeded in learning my doctor's name.

What followed was the worst and the emptiest period of my life. Just before the stroke I had obtained the application forms to enter the M.A. program at Carleton University, but that door was now closed to me forever. It was clear that with an injured memory I would not be able to do sustained intellectual work. I could not have managed physical work either; though the paralysis had healed, my left leg had gotten weaker, and I could not stand for long periods. I forced myself to walk, a little farther every day. The same went for reading. If at first, having gotten to the end of a page, I could no longer remember the beginning, gradually I was able to remember more and more.

Life started looking up again. The stroke had been in February, and by September I was back at work—as research assistant for my former professor in the Sociology Department of the University of Toronto. My memory was poor, and it was very hard to get used to this, since this had been an area where I shone before. With my professor's

permission, I reorganized the books and the catalogues as best suited me, so that I could find everything quickly. I kept paper and pencil by the telephone, and immediately wrote down the information given over the phone.

I worked in this position for one academic year. My next job was at “Nellie,” a temporary shelter for women and children whose homes were no longer safe places to be. I knew that I had found work that involved me totally, where I could use all of my abilities and talents.

I worked there for over seventeen years, until I retired at age 71. At first I worried about how I would fill my days. Now I smile when I think about it. Just as before, there are not enough hours in the day to do everything I want to do. Though I was told I only had two and a half years to live, I have persisted for twenty-five. Each year I go for a check-up at the neurologist’s. There are other ailments, too, but these only go to prove how tough a miserable soul can be.

In retrospect, it is interesting to see how many of my wishes have come true, and what has become of my inclinations. Though I finished high school with work to make up in handwork, in DP camp I earned extra food money by knitting. For a time in Toronto, my needlework was on sale in three shops, and there have been two one-woman shows of my tapestries. This past year I also learned how to weave on a loom. But I would probably not have made a good farmer’s wife. Even though I have never earned my bread as a washerwoman, there has been plenty of that kind of work in my life. What about my dream to become an actress? I have been on stage with Rein Andre’s drama studio, and dramatic director in the Sunday school. I have been a teacher in Germany and Canada. And as far as being a writer goes, I have written plenty of plays, poetry, and songs in my Sunday school work. Some of them have even been published. All of it has come at some point or other—even when I no longer knew how to hope.

As I look back over my life, which has been quite long, I think I have tried to make use of all the talents I was given, and in no situation have I ever given up.



Juta Pihlamägi

BORN 1927

I was born in Valga in 1927. My father was a career officer, commander of the Valga Motorized Tank Division. As a decorated hero of the War of Independence,¹ he had been awarded a piece of land from the Sooru estate, located near Valga, where he began building a home for his later years. The local elementary school was in the Sooru manor house, and the teachers boarded there. Father met a ca-

pable, pretty young schoolteacher, and they were married at midsummer in 1925. I was born two years later, and I was to remain an only child.

The first years of my life were spent at Sooru. Because of unemployment in Estonia in the 1930s, only one family member was allowed to hold a post as a civil servant. Thus my mother lost her job. For some years we lived in Valga. My parents built farm buildings on the Sooru land; an orchard of 100 apple trees was planted on a hillside; shrubs and flowers bloomed around the house.

In 1934 Father was reassigned from Valga to Tallinn, as assistant to the commander of the Motorized Tank Division. The Sooru farmland was rented out to tenants, but we spent the summer months at the farm ourselves. In 1938, Father graduated from the Advanced Military Academy, was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, and began working at Tallinn Technical University.

¹ Estonian War of Independence, 1918–1920, see Glossary. After the land reform, Veterans of the War of Independence were awarded pieces of land expropriated from Baltic-German landowners as a reward for military valor.

During the events of 1940,² Estonian officers were taken into the ranks of the Red Army; my father, too, had to don a Red Army uniform. I saw him for the last time in May 1940, riding into camp in a row of tanks and armored trucks. Before he left he made Mother promise that the day after school was over for the summer, I would be sent to the Sooru farm, but we were to tell no one where I was going. Mother was to join me in the country a week later. What was my father afraid of? What did he know? He gave Mother all the money he had, told her to buy a cow and a pig, and settle down closer to the farm, so that there would be something to eat when times got hard.

In the fall of 1941 we moved from Tallinn to Valga, where my mother took a job as a teacher. During the war classes were held irregularly and the high school kept moving to smaller and smaller quarters as the larger buildings were requisitioned for military hospitals. During the 1943–44 school year, we were only attending school every other day, and the school day was shorter. This lasted until the heavy air raids on Tallinn in March, and after that the high school was dismissed altogether. We moved to the country, where it was easier to find food: we milked the cow; the chickens laid eggs, and we grew vegetables in our own garden. Of course we had to work hard. Mother had grown up on a farm, but it took some doing for me to trade in my patent-leather shoes for leather *pastlad*³ and a parquet floor for a pasture.

The fall of 1944 was amazingly warm and dry. People had been driven out of the farms along Little River Emajõgi and sent farther and farther south, out of the way of the front. We found ourselves tens of kilometers away from home: in a patch of woods in northern Latvia we saw the retreating German infantry in the dawn twilight.

For a few hours, nothing could be heard from the nearby main road. Suddenly we heard a jangling sound and saw a cloud of dust. A grey-green tank came into view from around a bend in the road. When it noticed our band of refugees, the tank pulled to a halt. I saw a sign painted in white on the side of it, with the words in Russian: “We will liberate Soviet Estonia.” A young man with a very dark, flat face and almond-shaped eyes stuck his face out of the cabin. When he saw that our group was made up only of women, children, and a few old men, the young man smiled broadly, revealing a row of sparkling white teeth.

² Events of 1940, see Glossary under June 1940.

³ Handmade leather shoes, worn in the country.

A little girl called out in a high voice, “Mother, Mother, does he eat people, too?” Everyone grinned, and the tank driver wanted to know what the child had asked. Nobody ventured to translate, even though my mother spoke very good Russian.

A few more tanks arrived. The tank drivers jumped out, and offered the old men cigarettes, and the children candy wrapped in bright paper. Everyone seemed to be feeling awkward. The tankists had been told that they would be welcomed in Estonia with shouts of joy: after all, they had liberated us from the fascists. This sounded incredibly strange. The older tank driver ordered us to be on our way home; the main road had been cleared of mines, and it was quiet. Quickly we hitched the horses to the wagons, chained the cows behind the wagons, and off we went.

We passed small groups of lightly wounded soldiers, some with bandaged arms, legs, and heads. All of them were somewhat tipsy (the wounded were usually given liquor), and were casting long looks in the direction of the girls. There was no help for it but to put on an old woman’s skirt borrowed from another refugee, and to pull the kerchiefs down over our eyes. Then no one took a second look.

There were signs of war everywhere along the roadside: rotting carcasses of farm animals, with only a front or back leg cut off to send back to Germany on an airplane. Horses with swollen bellies and bared teeth. Here and there, unburied corpses hurriedly strewn with alder branches.

Little by little our column got shorter; one wagonload after another turned off onto side roads. After we had walked for about fifteen kilometers, our cow could not go further. We turned off the road to a small farm on the other side of a hill, and were kindly offered a place to stay for the night. People were hospitable in those days, and they would always try to help out the refugees.

The next day Mother decided to go and see what had become of our own little house. We had heard about the heavy battles by the Little River Emajõgi. Mother started on her way, promising to be back by the evening of the next day. I went to take the cows to pasture along with the farm’s Ingrian herding-girl, who was about my age.⁴ We got along well. She told me that the folks from the wealthy neighboring farm had fled abroad, and had buried some of their more valuable possessions.

⁴ Ingrians, see Glossary.

We were herding our animals at the edge of that abandoned farm. Suddenly we noticed that someone had been digging in the ground near three lovely spruce trees, and we immediately thought about the buried treasure. Quick, let's get a shovel! We took turns digging until we felt something scraping against the shovel. We held our breaths: had we found the treasure? The last few shovelfuls, and both of us screamed in horror: we had uncovered the crossed arms of a corpse. We quickly covered it back up again. Then we dug up a few shrubs from the edge of the field and planted them on the grave. May you rest in peace, unknown soldier of the great war!

Mother had already been gone for several days. My heart was heavy: if something happened to her, what was I going to do with our horse, our cow, and our little collection of possessions? I no longer dared to go to sleep in the barn at night. It was horrible: in my mind's eye I saw the crossed arms of the corpse, the cut-away face of the German, the contorted bodies of the unburied soldiers. I crept into the herd girl's bed, where it seemed safer.

My mother finally returned a week later. She had gotten lost on the way, since the farms along the road were empty of people, and there was no one to ask for directions. She had turned north at a large fork in the road, and stumbled upon a recent battlefield. Since it was starting to get dark, she decided to wait until morning to continue on her way. She tied the horse to a tree and made herself a bed in the wagon. The horse had pawed and snorted, and when dawn came the reason for its restlessness became clear: a few meters away, propped against a tree, was a dead German soldier with his eyes wide open. All around there was a jumble of Russian and German corpses, ammunition, and weapons. Once she got back on the main road, Mother had driven over several flat metal objects that looked like plates. The men explained that these were tank mines, but the horse and wagon were not heavy enough to make them explode. Years later Mother still spoke of that night as the most horrifying night of her life.

We started on our way home. The kind farmer's wife gave us a chunk of smoked meat and a loaf of country bread for the road. Our trip home passed without mishap. All that was left of the lovely roadside farms were a few chimneys left standing, a few small saunas on the banks of a brook or a pond. Not a human being in sight, no smoke from the chimneys, not a dog that barked. At evening we arrived at the neighbor's farm. We did not dare go further: from behind the spruce

hedge we heard a strange rattling noise. Later we discovered that it was the wind blowing against the burned out steel roof of our house. The neighbors' farm had been abandoned. The doors and windows of the farmhouse had been torn off and taken to the German bunker. We hung blankets in front of the kitchen door to keep some of the wind out. Mother started tending the animals, and I tried to start a fire in the stove. Suddenly I noticed five gray human figures at the edge of the woods, and they were moving toward us. Fear paralyzed me and closed my throat. A few minutes later, however, fear turned to laughter: these were our own boys, coming straight home from Narva. They had started on their way home through the woods and smaller villages. Huge pots of dye had been boiling in the woods, where girls were dyeing gray German outdoor uniforms black. All the men's clothing that was vaguely wearable was dragged out of wardrobes and chests. The neighbor's boy wore a dyed soldier's uniform like that for some time after the war: soldiers' clothing was of good quality and held up well.

The other neighbor boy got home a few days later, and looked like an animated scarecrow: his glasses were tied on with a piece of string, galoshes tied around his legs with shoelaces, and he was wearing home-spun trousers.

Since autumn 1944 was warm and dry, there was still time to gather in the harvest of overripe grain and vegetables. On many farms the buildings were partly or totally destroyed. People lived in the bunkers built by the Germans, or fixed up one of the outbuildings left standing for a place to live. The destruction of our lovely home was a hard blow to me. After we returned home it took me several days before I could bring myself to go out and look at it. When I got to the other side of the spruce hedge, it was a sad sight. All that was left of the house was a chimney with a bread oven and a stove, and the clay walls of the storage shed. All the other buildings had burned to the ground. But in the orchards red apples were shining in the apple trees, and the brightly colored autumn flowers were a beautiful sight. I walked over to the foundation of the house, and the pile of ash was almost up to my knees. I opened the oven door and found a cast-iron frying pan. When I opened the door to the roasting oven, there was a cooking pot there. Digging around in the ashes above the kitchen shelf, I found a dozen or so intact plates, forks, knives, and spoons. And so we had the bare necessities of kitchenware. We often prepared our meager meals on the stove under an open sky.

Rumors began to spread that all the Estonians had not died in Russia, that some were alive and had returned home. Someone had seen a busload of Estonian Red army soldiers in uniform, and some even claimed to know some of their names. Someone even claimed to have seen my father, who, it was also rumored, had been promoted to the rank of general. Mother and I walked to a farm a few kilometers away, where the farmer who had supposedly seen my father lived. He was hesitant to say anything, did not want to look at us, and did not want to answer any of our questions straight. He said he had drunk with my father, who had said he was not going to try to find his family until the war was over. This story about drinking sounded suspicious to me, because Father had never been much of a drinker. Some time later we found out that the farmer had made the whole story up to make us feel better.

The proper time for autumn farm work was long past. But the fields had to be cleared. The potato harvest was especially difficult, since there was no farm equipment to be had. Once the row was dug open, we had to pick the potatoes on our knees, gathering them into a basket. My knees and back hurt, and my thoughts were paralyzed. It was starting to get dark. Suddenly I noticed an army jeep driving into our yard. The thought was hammering in my head, Father has come! I don't know how I mustered the strength to jump up and rush up to the car. But there my last smidgen of strength collapsed: sitting in the car were total strangers, officers, who had lost their way. Spent, I fell on my face in the garden patch, and cried and cried.

In the meantime Mother had gone to Valga to check on our apartment. There were total strangers living there, who spoke only Russian, and would not share any part of the apartment, let alone giving it back to us. Mother succeeded in getting a modest two-room apartment in a different place.

School began late; it may have been in October. For some time we went to school in an intact clubhouse, but soon we got a real schoolhouse. Granted, it was not the big white building of the Valga high school, which was still being used as a military hospital, but a different building. Our graduating class had been diminished by quite a few students. There were practically no textbooks and the teachers would dictate all of the necessary materials.

We led a poor, miserable existence. Laundry soap and food staples, such as bread, flour, lard, sugar, meat (sausage) were on ration cards.

Grownups were also allotted vodka and a few packs of cigarettes. What did we eat? Mostly all kinds of potato and vegetable dishes, with a tiny bit of fat added. We spread margarine on bread, and drank grain coffee or herbal tea with saccharine. All kinds of food could be found at the market, but few people were able to buy it, since the prices were high and there was little money.

Mother continued to work as a teacher, and gave German lessons to Russian officers on the side. The officers paid for their lessons with groceries. We, too, were able to try out American canned meat. When three of Mother's students were together, they would only make very general observations, but individually they gave her good, solid advice.⁵ Mother was thinking about fixing up one of the farm buildings so that we could live in the country for the time being, so that it would be easier to feed ourselves. But one Ukrainian officer strongly advised against this, saying that sooner or later *kolkhozes* would come to Estonia.⁶ The *kolkhoznik* was the poorest person in Russia, and he had no place else to go. The second officer admonished us to live quietly without attracting attention, so that no one would have any reason to inform on us or to get jealous. If you want to survive, don't lift your head above the gray masses!

There was plenty of schoolwork to do, since the gaps in my knowledge from the war days needed filling. We went on our way to school with our bellies filled with poor-quality food, wearing dresses sewn together from motley pieces of fabric. Many wore galoshes to school. This universal footwear could be bought at the market, and it was worn by girls and boys alike, to school and to parties. In those years of cold winters, footwear for very cold days was felt boots, with white or grey leather soles. Our miserable clothing and scanty food were not the most important things on our minds, and actually no one paid much attention to them. We were young, and we hoped for a better life; that was what helped us put up with things.

In the last days of 1944 we found out that there would be a delegation sent from Valga to the Estonian Corps⁷ camp to deliver New Year's presents. We hoped to find out something about Father. There

⁵ An oblique reference to the climate of fear of the immediate postwar years, especially the fear of informants.

⁶ Collectivization of Estonian agriculture, see Glossary.

⁷ Eighth Estonian Rifle Corps, see Glossary.

were ten or so boys and girls from Valga led by an officer who arrived in the Klooga military camp.⁸ First we were taken on a tour of the death camp. Even the battlefield was not as horrible as this. The stacks of wood meant for burning corpses were still there, and it was especially horrible to look at the piles of cups, spoons, and tin dishes taken away from the prisoners who had been killed. I asked at least three people about Father, but no one knew anything. Gradually I lost all hope of ever seeing him again.

And yet there was something fateful for me in that visit to the camp. I noticed a young officer circling around our delegation. It turned out that he was from Valga, and was interested in finding out news from his hometown. As if by some miracle, he landed in the same railway car that we rode back to Valga the next day. A year later the young man came to woo me. My friends teased me, "You went to look for your father, but you found a husband instead!"

Spring was beginning to make itself felt. And then, one May morning, came the news that the war was over! In Valga they received the news with much drinking, especially among the Russians. Some slept sitting on the stairs, others right on the sidewalk, but all of them were drunk.

We, the high school graduates, also had our own last battle—our final examinations. There were ten of these. In our class everyone passed, some with good results, others with more modest ones. Three students got gold medals. At the graduation ceremony, the more successful students were given books as gifts by the school council. These were printed on poor quality paper with cardboard covers. But a half-century later, when the paper has yellowed and the covers have come loose, they are still cherished treasures, since they marked the end of one stage of life. For the graduation party the local Party executive committee issued flour, eggs, sugar, and we obtained some extra food on our own, so the table looked very nice. We even made ourselves new dresses; most of us had dresses sewn together from different kinds of fabric, and only a few had a graduation dress made from brand-new, whole cloth. The boys' suits showed even more of a range: the jackets were either too large or the sleeves were too short, and the pants legs were on the short side, too. Most of the clothing had been borrowed from relatives and friends.

⁸ Klooga military camp, see Glossary.

When the lilacs were in bloom, the Estonian Red Army soldiers returned home from Courland.⁹ Valga was the border town, and so we had to go and meet them on the Latvian–Estonian border. We waited by Frog Creek, carrying lilacs, tulips, and daffodils. And there they were, with tired steps, burned by the warm spring sun, covered with the dust of the road, but with happy faces. After all, the war was over and they had survived. Many had tears in their eyes, and the women soldiers let their tears flow. They took their first steps on the homeland soil on a carpet of flowers. At least they got that much, since the life that lay ahead of them was anything but a bed of roses.

I did not see much of the summer of 1945, since I had to study for university entrance examinations. Father had wanted me to become a dentist. I took the examinations for medical school. When they posted the names of those admitted at the lecture hall on Aia Street, and my friend and I found our names on the list, we all but danced down Vanemuise Hill. That was one of the happiest days of my life. But soon practical worries set in. When we were candidates for university admission we had been given cheap soup without ration cards in the university dining hall, but now they cut off a piece of our ration card with each meal. What did lunch look like? A plateful of cabbage, beet, or potato soup, with a bit of marrow bone for seasoning. The main course was a meat patty with potato or macaroni, sometimes with ground meat or fish sauce, and for dessert there was a glass of fruit soup made from dried fruit. Often that was the only meal of the day. Toward the end of the month there was sometimes not even that, since we had simply used up our ration cards. Rationed products were fat (margarine), grains (flour, millet, barley), sugar (candy), half a liter of vodka, a few packs of cigarettes and lots of bread. We sold some of the liquor, cigarettes, and bread and bought ourselves something from the market.

How did we manage to live on rationed food? We found every imaginable way of supplementing it. The university dining hall was understaffed, and students were given the opportunity to work as waitresses. They did not pay wages, but the food was free. There were sometimes too many applicants, but when it was available, it was a job. It was not bad for the first few hours, but after that the faces and orders got mixed up. The boys would mock us, “Miss, you didn’t bring

⁹ See Glossary.

me a fork!” “Miss, this spoon is crooked,” etc. Sometimes I wanted to turn a bowl of soup upside down on their heads. By evening we were dead tired; our hands shook from carrying the clay soup bowls, but our bellies were full! Not everyone suffered from hunger, though. The girls from the country got food packages from home, but my mother, a teacher, had nothing to send me.

Living conditions were hard, to put it mildly. A private apartment cost two kilos of butter or pork lard a month. Only very few could afford this. The first residence hall that was opened was on Kastani Street, where they had done some refurbishing, meaning that the walls had been whitewashed. There was no heating. We “organized” firewood from the yard of the nearby high school, where there were huge racks of firewood. Each time we walked across the yard we tucked a few logs under our arms and hid them under our beds. The rooms were so full of wood-frame beds that one could hardly move, and there was also a table and chairs. In winter we would not sleep under the sheets, since it was too cold. The girls had floor-length housecoats made out of German army blankets, and we slept in these, with one blanket underneath us and two on top. The stoves were not heated very often. Everyone came into the room with the stove top to heat their frying pan. Some people would try to heat water for tea on the electric stove, but then the fuses would blow in the whole building, and the building supervisor would be very angry.

I was housed on the top floor of the downtown polyclinic, where a few empty rooms had been assigned to university students. There it was even worse: at first there were not even any beds, and at night they put the chaff-filled mattress bags directly on the floor. In fall and winter of 1945, the lecture halls were unheated. We sat in lectures wearing our winter coats, wearing “market women’s” gloves—gloves with the tips of the fingers cut off. That was how we took notes, warming the inkpots in our left hands.

University students had to provide their own food and firewood. One day in late autumn we were ordered to come to the banks of the river Emajõgi to pull logs out of the water. We were handed large, long hooks. Between two or three of us we managed to haul one of the logs up onto the bank. By evening our clothes were wet and muddy, since no one had clothing appropriate for such a job. But a week later our lecture halls had heat! There was frost on the walls; the air was stuffy and misty, but at least it was warm!

The university had farmland near the Raadi estate, on the outskirts of Tartu, where they grew vegetables for the cafeteria. Everyone had to spend a few days harvesting cabbages, beets, and carrots. As we marched in a column across the bridge over the river Emajõgi, a group of German prisoners-of-war passed us. We spontaneously and softly started singing “Erika,” a marching song the Germans loved. The prisoners turned their heads toward us, with smiles on their faces. Later on we were a little afraid, since there were some *Komsomol* members among us.¹⁰ Miraculously, no one made more of that episode.

Soon we were assigned laboratory work and tests. I passed them all with satisfactory results. The grades for the first examination period were also mostly satisfactory. I had always been a good student. To this day I don’t know whether I didn’t study enough, or whether the problem was difficult living circumstances. Soon the officer I knew came to ask for my hand. I agreed to get married on condition that I could continue my university studies. Our wedding was modest, with only a dozen of our closest friends and relatives as guests.

During the winter rumors began to circulate that the Estonian Corps men were to be demobilized.¹¹ In reality the demobilization did not take place until the summer of 1946. By that time it was clear to me that I would never make a good doctor. What should I do? I had always been interested in literature and had gotten very good grades on language examinations. And so there was another round of entrance examinations, this time in philology. Studying in that department was not hard at all, and my grades were good.

Fall 1946 was the beginning of our life as a family. My husband was assigned to be assistant director of a special needs’ school, and the director was a Russian Estonian.¹² He was a strange mix of Estonian stubbornness and envy and Communist upbringing. The Russian Estonians showed up along with the Red Army, and quickly took over all the leading positions in the town. The students in the special needs school were completely supported by the state: they got free clothing, food, shelter, and education. Due to the war many of the underage students had lost their home, father, or all of their close relatives, and they eked out a living by stealing in train stations and at markets. The

¹⁰ *Komsomol*, communist youth organization, see Glossary.

¹¹ Estonian Corps (Eighth Estonian Rifle Corps), see Glossary.

¹² Estonians from Russia, see Glossary.

*miilits*¹³ would catch them, clean them up, and put them in school. At first it was hard going for both the children and the teachers, all of who were former military men. Within a few months the children were amenable, had learned a trade, and became fine working people.

We were given a room in the school boarding facility. The sink and the WC were in the corridor, but the stove top was in our room, and we could cook supper on the stove. It was poor, that first home of ours. In the mornings we would drink grain coffee and eat canned fish or a salt fish sandwich, and we would get the midday meal at the school. There, too, the food was on ration cards, but the quality was much better than in the dining halls in the city. In the evening I would put a pan of potatoes or a vegetable dish in the oven with a little piece of salted meat.

There were two major events in the university students' social calendar: the opening ball of the academic year, and the first class party. In autumn 1945 the opening ball was held in the university main auditorium. There was more than enough room on the dance floor. The young men had either fled west, been taken to prison camps, or the army. By 1946 more men began to show up at parties. At the class evenings everyone hoped to meet men. The philology students were, of course, a bunch of women, so we would choose the tallest, straightest and most handsome boys in the university to invite to our parties. The food and the band had been ordered, when suddenly the news came that Johannes Vares-Barbarus¹⁴ had died on 29 November 1946, and that all amusements were prohibited during the period of mourning. We were able to bargain for the right to pick up the food and eat it. Even the boys we had invited had come. Sad glances were exchanged across the table, since no dancing or singing was allowed. But there were whispers that the president of the Supreme Soviet, Vares, had not died a natural death.

Rumors began to spread about currency reform. It was hard to decide what to buy, since we needed everything. By coincidence I saw a brand-new karakul coat in the commission shop that cost just about as much money as we had at the time. What woman does not dream of a fur coat! My husband immediately agreed to buying it. People bought anything they could lay their hands on. I remember the farmer who

¹³ *Miilits*, Soviet police.

¹⁴ Johannes Vares-Barbarus, see Glossary.

bought both dental and gynecological tongs in a medical supply store. I asked him whether he knew what he was buying. He said, "I don't care...They are nice and shiny!" (*Mul üksta kama, illosa läikiva omma*).

Whole streets of the city were in ruins. Everyone had to put in a certain number of hours in cleanup and rebuilding work. Our assignment was the corner of Toome Hill just behind the Town Hall, which was covered with ruins of stone houses. Our tools were axes, shovels, stretchers, and our bare hands. The boys pushed over those parts of the walls that were still standing, we shoveled them onto the stretcher, and dragged it by hand into one corner of the field. And so we smoothed out the ground for what would become a park. What was left of the wooden buildings was chopped up for fuel by those who lived nearby, and soon our help was no longer needed.

There was a surprise in the summer of 1948: I was expecting a baby! Now we put our best efforts into finding an apartment, since a dormitory room was no place for a new baby. The local Tartu leadership had been taken over by Russian Estonians, who manipulated, lied, and acted aggressive, but who accepted bribes. As a demobilized officer, my husband had the right to housing, and he made many trips to talk to the city authorities, but to no avail. They laughed right in his face: without money he could not hope for anything. Another opportunity opened up. My mother had moved from Valga to Tartu, and she was lucky enough to get a two-room apartment on Kastani Street. To get one room she had given the apartment owner two of Father's brand-new suits, along with underwear and shoes. When the girl living in the other room got married, Mother got the apartment certificate entitling her to both rooms. When Mother went to the hospital with heart trouble, the *miilits* broke open the door to her apartment and moved a three-member Russian family in. Naturally, Mother protested, but nothing helped. It was an educated family, and when we suggested that we would move into the bedroom and kitchen that had been assigned to us, they happily agreed, since that gave them a completely private living space of their own.

I continued my studies, even though there was a chance to get a four-week maternity leave before giving birth, and the same length of time afterwards. The day I finally decided to go on leave, my son was born. In cases of normal births, mothers were kept in the maternity hospital for nine days, which meant one could recover completely. As soon as I got home, I went to lectures the very next day.

In those days there was not much of anything to buy in the shops. I got twelve meters of gauze for diapers and a little flannelette blanket. There were no special supplies for babies. But then again, there was a wealth of patterns in women's magazines. We were instructed to make little shirts and hats by hand out of old underwear. So one had to sacrifice one of the scarce sets of underclothing. Grandmother bought a white cotton jacket, hat and booties at the market, and a friend crocheted a warmer one from white woolen yarn. I got a few packages of cotton from the pharmacy, which I packed in between layers of gauze, and that made for a nice quilted blanket. The blanket bag was made out of an old summer dress. There was no baby carriage at first, so the baby's nest was a laundry basket of woven sticks. It was not until later that we were able to borrow a baby carriage, and a crib with netting.

While my mother and my husband went on going to work, I continued my studies. My husband had two jobs, and on top of that played in a dance band. We had to hire a babysitter, who would come for half a day, and my scholarship paid for her wages. My day began at 5:30 in the morning, when I hung up the diapers I had soaked during the night to dry in the attic. Then I would make a fire in the stove and boil water for coffee. At 6 AM the baby would call out for his morning feeding. After feeding and changing him, I quickly fixed a meal for the family—porridge, fried potatoes, or some sandwiches with margarine. My lectures began at 8:15. Between lectures I would rush to the children's milk bar behind the Town Hall for baby food. The milk bar was a very important institution, a big relief to young mothers. With a doctor's prescription one could get all kinds of food mixtures, vegetable purees, good milk, and porridge for little children. The food had been divided up into portions and poured into bottles; all one had to do was heat it up.

I studied in the afternoons, usually outside the home. By this time there were quite a few heated and quiet places to study. In the evenings I had to bathe the child, heat the oven, and prepare supper. Usually I would get to bed around 12 midnight, and rise again at 5:30. Sometimes I would be so tired that I would fall asleep in lectures. But over time things began to get easier. The child was accepted into day-care at age two. Then I had the whole day to work. And there were many joys: the child's first tooth, the first steps and words on his own. No one thought of asking the state for subsidies: you had to manage on your own.

We had begun the fourth year of studies when there was a big purge at the university: people with religious beliefs and anyone who was vaguely considered suspicious was thrown out, including boys who had fought in the German army, and girls with suspicious parents. I, too, had to give explanations on several occasions, as to when I had last seen my father, and where he was. At that time I really did not know about the tragic fate of Estonian officers, which became clear only many years later.

On 24 March 1949,¹⁵ the city was full of soldiers from the state security divisions, and it was clear to everyone that there was going to be another deportation. Many left home, but then their family members were taken. One of our distant relatives went into hiding, and they took his wife and their child of a few months instead. After that the man offered himself up to the deporters, but he was told, "The deportation is over, if you want to go and join your wife and child, you have to follow them at your own expense." Already the next day there was a Russian military officer and his family in the five-room apartment that the wealthy family had left behind. A woman almost 100 years old had been living there before, the goddaughter of the former high school teacher, and when the old woman asked my mother to go to her apartment to ask for her memorabilia, my mother could not refuse her. But the officer had said, "We were promised this apartment with all of the furnishings last November already." And so we realized that the deportation had been planned long in advance.

On the ground floor of our building lived a Russian Estonian¹⁶ with his Russian wife. The residents of the building knew that they had arrived in Tartu along with the regular army, carrying only a bundle tied to the end of a stick. The Russian Estonian was a fierce communist, who went around in the rural areas rounding up people for deportation. A few days after the deportation a long column of automobiles pulled up to the house loaded down with household furnishings: soft furniture, a piano, a dish cabinet, a table and chairs, and along with it piles of bundles and boxes of clothing. For a whole week the Russian woman aired out woolen blankets, fur coats, linen bedsheets and towels. But the owner of these belongings, a farmer, had escaped from

¹⁵ Preparations for 25 March 1949 deportations, see Glossary under Deportations.

¹⁶ See Glossary, Estonians from Russia.

the deporters, and one dark night he bashed in all the windows of the apartment.

The years passed quickly. My university diploma was already in sight, and after that, joining the work force. At the work assignment commission I accepted a teaching job in the Tallinn Technical High School, since the director of the school had promised my husband an apartment.

I went to Tallinn in the first days of August, 1951. My first day of work! I was excited and a little scared. I took a few deep breaths and there I stood in front of a class of 30 boys. They were not much younger than me, and most of them were robust farmboys from across Estonia. I immediately grasped the fact that they were more afraid of me than I was of them. That gave me back my self-confidence. It was difficult in the beginning, as I was the only Estonian-language teacher at the school. The work was stressful, but also very interesting. There was also tension with the school administration, who regarded the teaching of Estonian with a certain degree of contempt. The director was a KGB man, the director of studies was half-Russian. I should have chosen a job where the administration had a better attitude toward things Estonian, and toward the Estonian language.

There were many claims on the small amount of wages we earned, beginning with the government itself. We “volunteered” to take out state loans right after the end of the war. The state borrowed a month’s wages each year from citizens who had been stripped naked and burnt out by the war, “for purposes of rebuilding and developing the people’s economy.” This “borrowing” lasted for years. For the money our family “loaned” we could have bought ourselves a car. When the loan was finally paid back, all I got for it were curtains for one window.

Another important event of world history took place in the 1950s. On the morning of 5 March 1953 I was at the Nõmme train station waiting for the electric train when the familiar voice of the Moscow radio reporter sounded from the loudspeaker: “Jossif Vissarionovitch is dead.” The Russian women immediately started howling and squealing, and the other people waiting for the train stood stiffly at attention for several minutes. Chaos had broken out at the school as well. A woman Party organizer¹⁷ wept buckets, her eyes and face swollen. The Russian teachers were quiet and deadly serious. The lessons were to

¹⁷ *Partorg*, see Glossary.

begin any minute, and there were orders to devote the first hour to the great leader's heroic life. I can't remember exactly what we said, but somehow we managed to hold such a lesson.

Some time later, when the negative side of the "cult of personality" was revealed, the Russian women teachers were confused. "Now we don't understand anything at all: we were raised to honor Stalin as a kind of god. The first word the children learned was 'Mama,' the second was 'Stalin.' And now it turns out that he wasn't a god at all, but a brutal murderer of millions, a liar and a thief."

I had worked beyond any reproach for many, many years, before I dared remind the school board of their promise to provide me with an apartment. Up to this point we had rented a room in a private home for a high price, but it was not allowed to bring a child there. It was very hard to be apart from my little boy, even though he got excellent care from his grandmother in Tartu. The director mocked: "First you have to earn your apartment!" But he put it to my husband straight: "If you pay, you might get it!" One of my husband's former war buddies suggested that he find himself a plot of land and start building, instead of lining the pockets of speculators. And that is what we did. The land was in a good location in Nõmme,¹⁸ surrounded by finished houses. They gave out the plots of land for free, about 600 meters square, and one could build a house with a total area of 100 meters square. In the first year the foundation was laid; in the second, the walls were put up and the roof put on; in the third they did the interior work. My husband had no experience with construction work, and was only able to assist, but he was very skillful in obtaining materials, and he did not spare his efforts. I remember how he would get up at 5 AM, put three water pipes on his shoulder, and carry them from Tallinn to Nõmme. It would have been too expensive to rent a truck for three pipes, and there was very little money anyway. My husband worked two jobs, and I worked as much as I could, too. My work week was six days long, and I gave over 40 hours of lessons: the morning shift, the afternoon shift, evening classes, the distance learning division, and one day a week in another school. Often I was so tired that I fell into bed. During the three years we were building our house, we did not buy anything new. I would unravel my school dress every summer and turn it inside out so that it would look a little fresher.

¹⁸ Suburb of Tallinn.

In 1960 we moved in to our own home in Nõmme. When we took possession of the house, we had to present the commission with proof of the income of all the members of our family, as well as receipts for construction materials. Houses built with income that was not generated by employment were simply confiscated. The overly taxing work done for a house of our own was not without its price: I started having heart trouble; my husband had gone gray in three years, and was complaining of joint pain.

By the 1960s life had significantly improved: there were more goods in the shops: factory-made goods and foodstuffs. There was enough work for everyone, and it was a shameful thing if a young, able-bodied person was not working. Such people were referred to as shirkers.

After we moved to Nõmme, it took a few years for me to get a job in the local high school. My ten years in the Nõmme high school were happy ones: all was well at home, and things were in order in school. Nõmme folks have a strong sense of home, since it is common for many generations to have grown up and lived in the same house.

A few years later my own girls (former students), now studying in university, came to me to do their practice teaching. They confessed that while they were still in school they had grumbled about my high expectations, but that their university examinations were much easier for it. Meeting up with former students has always been pleasant for me.

I retired in 1980. My mother had lost her eyesight and needed care. My pension was half of my former salary, but I managed quite well on that; I could go to the theatre, to exhibitions, I read, did needlework, and sometimes acted as tour guide to Finns that I knew. It was a peaceful life, and the years flew by.

Meanwhile, the winds of change had begun blowing, and one of the signs was the taunting of men who had been in the war on TV and in the newspapers.¹⁹ I remember the TV broadcast put together by young people, in which all kinds of medals had been hung on an old man wearing pajamas, and the old man was made to look totally brainless. My husband watched that broadcast and tears flowed down his cheeks. Mortally offended, he said: "How can the young people miss the fact that we did not start the war, and we did not go there

¹⁹ Juta Pihlamägi is referring to growing negative sentiments toward veterans of the Red Army during the late 1980s and the "national awakening" movement.

voluntarily. Now we are even being blamed for surviving!“ In the spring of 1989, on Victory Day,²⁰ to be exact, his heart stopped beating. But the old worker was spared another cruel twist of fate. We had saved up a nice sum of money for our later years, and during the currency reform it turned into a mere handful of crowns. As a thrifty person, this would have been very difficult for him.

Life went on. There were the Deer Park speeches, the Baltic Chain, exciting days, indeed.²¹ And after that, freedom! Estonia was shouting and celebrating. But the speechmakers turned quickly into politicians, who began frittering away the nation's wealth; some of it went to line their own pockets, and some went abroad. A narrow sector has its hands on tens of millions, while in the morning one can hear the clanging of garbage cans, as some people have to look there for their life's necessities.

My story is the story of my generation. As the children of war and the postwar years, we are society's orphans. We gave society more than was expected of us, but in return we received less than we deserved. Thanks to our hard work, a war-torn Estonia became a worthy place to live for our children.

²⁰ Victory Day (*Võidupüha*), see Glossary.

²¹ Deer Park demonstration and Baltic Chain in 1989, see Glossary.



Volita Paklar

BORN 1937

The first time I decided to take stock of my life was when I turned thirty. By that time, others my age had already created a home and a family; some even had school-aged children. My own achievements were limited to a conservatory diploma and a very good job. I was living in my mother's small apartment, sharing the middle room with an aged grandmother and a brother who was a student at the univer-

sity. The only way to get one's own apartment, a two-week vacation package, a kindergarten spot, and other "luxury" goods in the land of the Soviets was to use the "pushing and shoving method." That was so humiliating that to this day I have not mastered it. Change in my marital status was not immediately on the horizon, either. Of course, there were men in my life, even some worthy ones. My love stories were not punctuated by betrayal, intrigues, and classical triangles, but they always entailed unusual, insoluble predicaments and stupid misunderstandings; they ended with ellipses, not periods. "Volka, you are a sad case," I said to myself.

Only now, looking back on my life again, can I look at my past as a chain of lucky events. Even in the most inconsolable situations, kindness came my way. Sparks of joy flew, lighting the lantern of my life again and again. Sometimes the light would grow so strong, it became a lighthouse. This story is about those sparks of joy.

I was born in 1937 in the Soviet Union. Was my birth not already the luckiest of coincidences? That horrible year I might not have been born at all: soon afterwards my father was sent to prison for ten years. It was also lucky that he came back, though as an invalid. During the

last three years of his life there were happy events in the life of our family: my brother's birth and our move to Tartu.

To put it more precisely, I first saw the light of day in Byelorussia, in Vitebsk. Father wanted to be original, and to give me a meaningful name, as was the fashion in those days. In Latin, *volito* or *volo* means will, striving, transfiguration... And so, because of my merciful father, I had to listen to everyone distorting my name in every way imaginable. To the Russians I was Valeta, Violetta, Velveta, Valisa, Vasilita, Valuta... Estonians twisted my name according to their own particular taste: Valida, Vanita, Velita, Lolita, Viola, Volinda, Volanda...

Vitebsk is an industrial city in Byelorussia, a major railway—and highway junction. The Western Dvina, a broad river with a fast current, flows through it; when it reaches Latvia, it is called the Daugava. I do not have a drop of Byelorussian or Russian blood in my veins. My father was an Estonian, and my mother, Veera Kostõrko is from the banks of the Black Sea. My grandmother was a baptized Jew; baptism making it possible for her to marry Dmitri Kostõrko, who was Ukrainian. Grandmother graduated from high school and worked as an elementary school teacher; grandfather was a military physician. At first they lived in the city of Nikolajev, where my mother was born. Later on, my grandparents divorced. Grandfather moved to Odessa, where he lectured at the Medical Institute. During the school year, he would take his daughter to live with him and his new family. My mother graduated from the Medical Technical School, and after that, from the Institute.

In 1930 my mother and my grandmother were fortunate enough to escape from the famine in Ukraine to Leningrad, where it was much easier to find food. That was where my parents met. At the time my father was studying toward his doctorate at the Institute of Literature and History, and at the end of his studies he was obligated to sign an agreement if he was to be offered the position of the Dean of the Faculty of History at the Vitebsk Pedagogical Institute. This stroke of my father's pen was what determined my place of birth. If my parents had delayed the move even a little bit, I would have been born in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg).

Even though my father was born in Russia, he had a perfect command of Estonian, a thorough knowledge of Estonian history and literature, and he even edited Estonian-language magazines in Leningrad. Without an understanding of history, it is difficult to understand this.

Estonians began to emigrate in the 1860, after the reforms.¹ The Estonian émigrés lived in Russian villages and settlements. As a rule the communities built a school and a church at their own expense, and sent for teachers from Estonia. The villages usually had lending libraries, choirs, and orchestras... The Estonian schools continued to function even after the Revolution. Leningrad Technical High School and the Herzen Pedagogical Institute trained teachers for them. It was not until 1937 that total destruction began. Every fourth Russian Estonian perished. Ethnic culture was mercilessly destroyed, and from that time on, the Estonian language was banned. Many Estonian families no longer dared to speak their mother tongue among themselves. My father was born in 1908, and he still had the opportunity to get a full-fledged Estonian-language elementary education.

My forefathers were among the first to emigrate from Estonia in the middle of the 19th century. They were workers at the Räpina manor, and did not own their own land. Together with many other Estonian families, they founded the Estonian village at Samara. My grandfather, Karl Paklar, was involved in the laying down and repair of telegraph lines. He married Marta Nigol, a bewitching, talented woman whose family was from the Kanepi village in Estonia. He was very happy with her. Unfortunately Marta died when their only son, Ernst, was only thirteen years old. From that time on, since his father was often away on business trips, my father was left in the care of relatives. It was a hard time—the time of the revolution and the Civil War: famine, misery, emptiness. With great difficulty the young man was able to obtain a secondary education in the nearest regional center. He continued his studies in the Herzen Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad, and after that pursued his candidate's degree. My father's life dream was to return to his historic homeland, a dream that did not come true until 1947, when there was no longer an official border between Estonia and Russia.

In Vitebsk my father was given a nice apartment, but after his arrest we were evicted and sent to live in a barracks. I remember those barracks very well. In the winter the water would freeze in the kitchen, but we were still fortunate enough to heat our room comfortably. I grew up as a healthy, calm child, who did not lack for anything. Next to my bed there was a shelf full of toys and children's books. On my

¹ After agricultural reforms of the second half of the 19th century.

woven child's couch there was a row of finely dressed dolls. These were the gifts of my mother's many friends when I turned three. I also remember the glowing New Year's Tree, which was decorated on New Year's Eve of 1940. Even today I can still describe the furnishings of our room, what each doll looked like, even the pictures in my books. Some people might think it is unbelievable that at three and a half I could remember so much. The only explanation for my phenomenal memory was the extremity of those times. My birthday party and the New Year's Eve tree were the last I remember of decent food, sweets, entertainment. I was deprived of all of this too suddenly, and later dwelt on memories of every detail of the past, a rose-colored fairy tale set against the background of the realities of war.

A black shadow suddenly fell over my world, while I was playing with the other children outside one summer day. The quiet was shattered by a horrible bellowing noise. I remember the grownups' faces distorted by fear as they dragged me quickly to the cellar of a neighboring building. I whined and resisted: who would want to leave the sunny yard and be dragged suddenly into a dark, cold cellar, especially if no one gives any explanations? My older friend Sonya finally succeeded in calming me down, explaining that in just a few seconds airplanes were going to fly overhead and throw bombs down on us. I might get killed. These were strange new words to me. You were not allowed to go on the street, as you might accidentally get run over by a car; that I knew. But why would anyone deliberately want to harm me? That piece of stupidity could not fit into my little head. There we sat in the cellar, listening to the howling sound outside, rumbling, bellowing, whistling. My vocabulary was continued to expand: bomber, destroyer, zenith cannon, siren, end of air raid.

Within three days the Germans had arrived in the outskirts of Vitebsk, a very important strategic location. Special forces of the Russian Army were fulfilling Stalin's orders to leave the enemy nothing but scorched earth. Our barracks were set on fire. We were lucky to save our winter clothing, but the family archive was destroyed in the fire. The polyclinic was full of the wounded. They were brought in, then loaded on trucks that transported them behind the front lines. We hoped to get on one of those trucks, but in vain. As soon as the last truck had crossed the river, all the bridges were blown up. They also shot at the boats on the river. It was a trap: a wide river in front, a burning city behind. The horrible night we spent on the banks of that

river will remain in my memory forever. The whole horizon was a circle of fire, outlining the black silhouettes of people. We pressed ourselves against the sandy wall of the embankment, our only hiding place from the bombs and the shells. Then we were running somewhere (maybe to get out of the way of the tanks): my grandmother carrying the suitcases, I in my mother's arms. In the morning we came upon an abandoned forest hut. I was put to bed immediately, but I could not fall asleep for a long time, since there was no little pillow named Kika. The next morning I only found Grandmother with me. Mother did not reappear until evening, and immediately started peeling off her wet clothes and underwear. Grandmother explained, "See, Mother had to swim to the other side of the river to get your Kika." Sure enough, Mother handed me my favorite pillow. Decades later I reminded my mother, who does not have very good swimming skills, of that episode, and asked her how she dared swim across that wide river. It turned out that she really did not have to swim very far. The bundles with our things in them were hidden somewhere on the opposite bank. Mother went to get them along the ruins of the blown-up bridges—just like everyone else.

The next day we returned to the city. The stone buildings downtown were still standing, among them the polyclinic. By chance we saw Varja there, the domestic helper of our family friends, the doctors Aleksandrov. We found out from her that the family had been able to evacuate, that Varja herself would be traveling to her relatives, but that the Aleksandrovs' apartment was intact and empty. We should go and live there! Here was the key! And so we found ourselves a new home.

We hardly had a chance to take a good look around, when "visitors" arrived, some kind of men in grayish-green clothing. Grandmother was heating water for them to shave. One of them, in a nice uniform, asked Mother something in an incomprehensible tongue, and to my great surprise, Mother answered him in the same language. Then the officer started asking me questions, and I answered as Mother prompted me. After the "visitors" left, I found out that the questions were designed to provoke us: did I love my mother very much, and what would happen to me if she were taken away? The next day Mother and I went swimming in the river. On the riverbank we saw an incredible sight: some columns made of black bricks were lined up in neat rows, across the whole horizon, like a great big piece of modernist art. I kept on asking why there were so many "funny buildings" here. My mother did

not respond for a very long time, but finally she explained that there used to be houses here, and that this was all that was left of them. That was what the scorched earth looked like, and we were left behind to live in this land. Then it was not so funny to me any more.

We started getting used to the war. Ration cards, curfews, darkened windows at night, boarded windows, air raid alarms, nights spent in bomb shelters, foreign soldiers on the streets—all of these became everyday occurrences. We lived this way until the last months of 1943. Then the occupation forces ordered us to prepare for a trip to Germany, where the eastern European camp inmates needed medical attention. Along with many of my mother's colleagues, we were loaded onto a cattle car. There were long stops on the way: in some places they had to repair the railway, or allow military trains to pass; often they would repair the engine, which barely functioned. At Bialystok, on the Polish border, it turned out that our locomotive was hopelessly damaged. That sealed our fate, and put an end to the trip to Germany. But we did not realize that until later.

For the time being we were taken to a camp surrounded by a barbed-wire fence, and housed in large barracks crammed full of wooden bunks. Carrying our own dishes we stood in line for thin soup. We were released about a month later, and began looking for a place to live in the former Jewish ghetto. That place was very similar to the abandoned military settlements in Estonia in more recent years:² empty sections of town, looted and recklessly destroyed houses. Finally we found the only habitable building, meaning that it still had doors and windows. Several Vitebsk families were able to squeeze in there. The ethnic composition of the town was diverse. During the German era, in addition to Polish and Russian schools there were also Ukrainian and Byelorussian schools. My family was fortunate to soon make the acquaintance of an Ukrainian schoolteacher. Both sides were happy to be able to speak their mother tongue. Our new acquaintance, Jelizaveta Vassiljevna, found out that I had already learned to read and do arithmetic, and she got the idea of teaching me to write as well. Ukrainian was not a foreign language to me; my grandmother had taught me to speak and sing in it while we played together. I was charmed by the melodiousness of the Ukrainian language. And so I became a pupil in the Ukrainian school. It was so difficult to write my letters with pen

² Since the mid-1990s.

and ink! I was only six years old, but there was no escaping it. The other subjects were more enjoyable, including religious education, which was taught to us by the priest of the local church. When he saw that he had a new student, he asked me whether I knew any prayers. I recited the "Our Father," which I had learned from my godmother. I was given a nice, colored picture of the Holy Mother as a prize.

Once classes were canceled because of the advancing front. Everything that had happened before in Vitebsk was repeated now. We sat in a shelter for days on end, eating only salty crusts of bread. The surrounding neighborhoods were in flames. In all that hell the ghetto was one of the most peaceful places, as there was nothing to bomb or burn. It seemed that the whole world had forgotten us. One evening Germans pulled up to our doorstep on motorcycles. Categorical orders were issued: everyone had to leave here tomorrow and head in the direction of Warsaw, or else. We hid in the ruins instead. We had been sitting there for half a day, quiet as mice, when we heard someone running toward us. We prepared ourselves for the worst, but it was only our neighbor: "The Russian tanks are in town!" Hurrah, the liberators have come! Children had a chance to ride on the tanks. And how many interesting things there were—helmets, guns, cartridge belts and other accessories left behind by the German soldiers to play with!

In the summer of 1944 the war was still going on, but we already knew that the Polish border had been moved: Bialystok would remain in Poland, but the adjacent town, Grodno, would now belong to the Soviet Union. We were ordered to return to our own territory immediately. We found a soldier who was willing to take us to Grodno in his covered jeep in return for Mother's gold watch. Grodno was a dear little Polish town about the size of Pärnu, where, strangely enough, there were very few signs of war. Clean, brightly-colored Grodno reminded me of a box of chocolates. At first we stayed in a hostel, until we found an apartment abandoned by some Poles. The natives of this area had also been forced to resettle elsewhere, since their home was now located in alien territory. In September I was taken to school, this time a Russian-language one.

Our school was a large, pretty building in a spacious green courtyard. The windows were without glass at first, but by the time the winter cold arrived, they had been glassed in. After greetings and congratulations the school director introduced us to the school rules. I especially remember his explanation that it was permitted to come to

school barefoot, provided that one's feet were clean. It was then that I noticed that some of the children were indeed barefoot. For almost a month we did not have our own teacher. We were "entertained" by an artist, the military education supervisor, the Young Pioneers' leader, and even the head of the financial department, each to the measure of his or her abilities and energy. Finally the director brought a small, dark-haired, middle-aged woman into our classroom, and said this was our real teacher, whose name was Sofia Abramovna Margolina. From that time on we had serious and systematic instruction.

At around the same time I learned that not all liberations brought real freedom and joy. One morning when I awoke I saw my grandmother crying. During the night the NKVD had come and taken my mother away. I do not know what would have become of us if we had not had a generous and golden-hearted neighbor: Ivan Stepanovits Orlov, a pediatrician, a 65-year-old aristocratic gentleman, who had buried his wife and lost a son in the war. Dr. Orlov had been my doctor since I was born. As fate would have it, we had survived all the adventures of the war together, and were now living in the same building. After my mother's arrest Grandmother immediately looked for work. Her paltry pension would only have lasted the two of us for a few days. All of her documents had been destroyed in the fire, and therefore she could no longer hope to work in her area of specialization, only as a cleaning woman or a nurse's aide. But this, too, would have meant starvation. "Uncle Vanya" solved the problem for us with great tact, offering to employ Grandmother as his housekeeper, in return for all of us sharing a table. And so we were saved from starvation. But Uncle Vanya had yet another heroic deed to his name.

Mother had two lifelong passions, the piano and the theater. The piano had already cast its spell over her in Odessa. Grandfather's new wife was also a faculty member in the conservatory. Mother learned the basics of technique there, and got to know the piano repertoire. As long as I can remember, we have always had a piano at home, and Mother has played. Our first rented piano was destroyed in the barracks fire. But there was a piano waiting in the Aleksandrovs' apartment. Even in Bialystok Mother was able to find an abandoned piano somewhere, but not in Grodno. Finally, the long-awaited letter arrived from Mother from the camp. We found out that she was in the far north, in Komi. In the very next letter Mother asked that I be taken to the music school entrance examinations. I auditioned; the competition was stiff, but

I was admitted. But where was I going to practice? Around the same time there was talk of currency reform. Everyone was trying to get rid of money that was soon to be worthless. My benefactor Dr. Orlov decided to get rid of his “tree leaves”³ by buying me a new German piano, which took me through several music schools and survived several moves. Even now this family relic is in good working order in my home.

My mother’s passion for the piano determined my fate, but her passion for the theater gave our family a new lease on life. Mother not only loved to go to the theatre, but she participated actively in drama circles and amateur performances. She had her chance for this in camp as well. They performed Trenjov’s “Ljubov Jarovaja,” so successfully that they took the show on the road—from camp to camp. One such guest appearance was fit for a film: my father was sitting in the audience when suddenly he saw his own wife on the stage. Father devoted a poem to that event, with the lines: “And the devil played a cruel joke on me, sending me to be with you in hell!” When the war started, we had lost track of our father. The old devil’s joke was a very lucky thing for us, for without it we could never have found our father again in the chaos that followed the war.

In the summer of 1946 I was at home alone one day, when the doorbell rang downstairs at the outside door. A strange-looking woman came in, wearing a kerchief and carrying a wooden suitcase. “Siisike, dear...” From the dim hallway I could hear my nickname pronounced with such a familiar intonation, there was only one person in the whole world it could possibly be. A cry escaped me, and I did not even recognize my own voice. A moment later I was hugging my mother. Mother loved surprising people, and this time she had not notified us of her release. She had been in a screening camp, where some prisoners were kept for less than 10 years. Again she was lucky!

Now I wrote letters to faraway Komi, this time to Father, who had been given back to me so unexpectedly thanks to Mother’s amateur theatre activities. I got to know him through our correspondence. A year later we were already receiving letters he sent from Tartu. After he was released, Father went to Estonia, the land of his dreams. He did all sorts of translation work there, and historical research, and was even able to go to the banks of Lake Peipus to search for the site of the

³ “Tree leaves” was a popular euphemism for the large-sized, almost worthless paper currency.

Ice Battle.⁴ It was time for us to leave Grodno, since it had been designated *oblast* center, and my Mother was not allowed to live there with her “soiled” passport.

At the beginning of 1948 Mother and I travelled to Tartu. After Grodno, which resembled a candybox, Tartu was depressing. The street they called Riia Street was a snow-covered wasteland except for a few buildings. What a heap of ruins! Father’s workplace as well as his residence was the Estonian SSR Academy of Sciences, which in those days was located in a grand building with columns in front, on Riia Street, which today houses the Baltic Defense College. His tiny room contained both a desk and a cot. All of this was thanks to a good person, Richard Kleis, the director of the Historical Institute of the Estonian Academy of Sciences. Hiring a former political prisoner required great courage. We lived together in Father’s tiny room for a month, and 9 months later my little brother was born. I slept by the door on an improvised bed made out of suitcases, but I was very happy: for the first time in my life I had both a mother and a father. Just a little while earlier I had been an orphan, with neither. My parents talked things over, and decided that Father would remain in Tartu to look for an apartment, but would send us for the time being to the city of Bugulma in the Tatar Republic, where his kind, unmarried Aunt Liine lived.

We made our way to Moscow, where Grandmother was waiting for us. There we had to change trains for Ufa. The trains were overcrowded, and there was chaos in the train stations. We waited in line for many days at the ticket counter. Finally our papers were in order, and the train took us in the direction of Ufa to the Asian border, to the Bugulma station, located between Uljanovsk and Ufa. The city of Bugulma turned out to be just a little smaller than Grodno, but what a contrast! A classic godforsaken Russian town, off the beaten track. Little log houses, mud up to your knees. Only the main street was paved, and there were a few stone houses, no greenery at all, and goats were wandering around. My great-aunt also kept a goat, along with some sheep and chickens. The little house with a thin thatched roof came with a healthy-sized potato patch. All of this made it possible for her to survive, and she had to share it all with us, at least for the time being. Fortunately we did not have to abuse the old lady’s hospitality for

⁴ Ice Battle, see Glossary.

very long, since Mother was given a small room to live in, on hospital property.

The hospital took up a large tract of land. All the departments were housed in wooden buildings, from the maternity ward to the venereal disease unit. Some of the staff also lived there. This unusual “state within a state” even had its own power station, but there were no electric switches or plugs in the rooms we lived in. Whether or not there was light was decided in the engine room, where the lights were on all night. This was where I got used to reading at night. The hospital grounds were even grass-covered, since they were surrounded by a fence that the goats could not get through. Another rare domestic animal lived here instead—a cow. It belonged to the family of the chief mechanic of the electric station. I got to be friends with his older daughter, Tonja. There were four other children in that family, the youngest of whom was three-year-old Kolja. Once I happened to visit Tonja during the midday meal. The family was sitting around the table, in the middle of which was a pot of boiled potatoes. Everyone took a potato, sprinkled coarse salt on it, and ate, washing it down with unsweetened tea. There were no dairy products in sight. I expressed my amazement to Tonja. She shrugged and said, “We only have enough milk for Kolja. The state takes away the rest.” The large family slaved for the sake of a large animal, and was only able to provide milk for one small child! Then I understood why goats were so popular here, and cows so unpopular.

There in Bugulma, in November 1948, my little brother Äрни (Ernst Paklar junior) was born.

By fall 1949 my father had keys to an apartment. We faced another long journey, all the way across the European part of Russia. After the tight quarters of Bugulma, the two rooms in Tartu seemed like a palace, even though both of our windows looked out on the bare walls of ruins. The tiny kitchen was shared by three families, but until very recently we had not even had that. Father took me to the recently rebuilt High School Number No. IV (today the Pushkin Gymnasium), which I would attend through to the end of high school. A new subject was added to my curriculum there—Estonian language. My father helped me with it at first. He had already gathered a pile of textbooks for my mother and me. Our studies were soon tragically interrupted: my father had another heart attack and died. We had the feeling that we had been left without a guide at the very beginning of our journey.

We were foreigners in this society, but we were not allowed to leave—my father's last wish had been that his children would sink their roots into Estonian soil. So we had to learn the language without his help. Mother accomplished this through the constant practice she had communicating with her patients. I had nowhere to practice. The Estonian children treated me like an alien—an “occupier” after all! Many Estonians reacted to my family name with laughter: that one wants to be an Estonian, too! I did not begin to feel at home in the Estonian language until I went to music school, where Estonian was the language of instruction. There I found my first Estonian friends.

In Tartu I attended children's music school, where my teacher was Marta Jõudu, a dignified elderly lady, who had been the wife of a banker in the recent past. She was regarded as a model of conscientiousness, and was highly respected. Among ourselves we referred to our favorite teacher as “Martake.” My previous experiences with playing the piano were scattered and chaotic. I had studied with varying degrees of success with bad and slightly better teachers, but I had always thought of this as a boring additional chore. The trouble was that no one had taught me how to read music at the right time, and I tried to play by ear. In Bugulma, pianos had been a rarity. A year and a half without a teacher was a blow to my technique. Once when I played for Martake, she took her head between her hands and said, “My dear! We have to begin all over again with you!” And now war broke out at home. In tears, I begged my mother to take me out of music school, but it never worked: I had to finish the seventh grade in children's music school, and after that it would be my own decision. If my mother and Marta Jõudu had been more yielding, I would not have my beloved work today. I was a great nuisance to my teacher, since I could make anyone very angry with my shameless sabotage. But not Martake. She worked with me with the patience of an angel, and pulled me along with great effort from grade to grade. The breakthrough came at the end of the fifth grade. I had gone to see the wondrous film, “Fame's Prelude,” which turned my attitude toward music. I was amazed that I had not noticed this lovely world before. A miracle happened, which could only have been brought about by real art. By the sixth grade, Martake could no longer recognize me. I had made excellent progress. At the spring examinations, A. Semm-Sarv, the director of the music school and the idol of Tartu pianists, listened to me play. She recommended that I come immediately to the music school entrance examinations, even

before graduating from the children's division, and promised to take me into her class. "You are very lucky," Martake said to me, "it is a great honor to be the student of the great Semm-Sarv!"

It is hard to overestimate what it meant for me to study with A. Semm-Sarv, who was a deeply learned individual, a fine psychologist, with God-given talents as a teacher. She not only taught piano, but she became a spiritual mother to me. Thanks to her, the time I spent in the Tartu music school (1953–1957) was one of the best periods of my life, full of enthusiasm for work, creative quest and romantic experiences. There were clouds in my sky, though. My weak technical foundation made itself felt. I was able to meet the program requirements due to my large hands, but my playing remained uneven. At examinations and performances, the old weaknesses resurfaced. That was what happened at the entrance examinations to conservatory. I was not admitted. I signed some documents, and faced life on my own and work at the new children's music school in Võru.

Everything about Võru was charming to me: a quiet, green town on the banks of a picturesque lake, beautiful natural surroundings outside the city, and friendly people. I was a young specialist, cared for like a rare potted plant by students, parents and the director, who impressed me by his extraordinary friendliness. A highly talented musician, great enthusiast, and pleasant person all around, Hendrik Juurikas bore all the difficulties of establishing a new school on his own. I even had new concert pianos to use! Firmly embedded in my mind were the words of my last teacher: "Practice, keep yourself in shape, and take every opportunity to continue your studies! You have great potential!" And I did practice: I worked on my technique, learned new repertoire, and performed in front of an audience whenever I had a chance. I waited for my golden hour.

And it came. The Tallinn conservatory established a distance-learning division. I had what it took to be admitted. This time I was among the first to be accepted, and was even invited to perform at the opening convocation. I chose my own teacher—docent Laine Metsa. Some sixth sense made me feel that this modest, balanced teacher would suit me. My teacher's goal was not to turn us into virtuoso performers, but rather deeply cultivated professionals. No pressure, no overloading with repertoire. The repertoire was at an appropriate level, and the polishing was thorough. My playing was no longer so uneven. At least once a month I had to go to Tallinn to play for docent Metsa.

Those expensive and tiring trips through the republic were always a happy experience for me. To work and study on the side was strenuous, but not overwhelming. But the additional responsibilities were overwhelming indeed. More and more choirs, orchestras, ensembles, and soloists were created, and these were forced on us by our dear, music-loving Võru people. Late rehearsals, frequent concert tours, which as a rule were followed by loud parties: It was a good thing that my young, strong constitution was able to handle all the pressure of this lifestyle for many years. My work was going well, and my students were making progress. I had only one year left of traveling between Võru and Tallinn when A. Semm-Sarv invited me to come and work at the Tartu Music School. By then I had not only been in Võru for two to three years, as my work assignment dictated, but rather for nine years. I would have been a provincial patriot for even longer, if I had had humane living conditions. The city of Võru had assigned me a room (ten square meters) in a rotting wooden building slated for demolition, with the “comforts” located out in the yard. Across from me there lived some drunkards, and the whole apartment smelled of their favorite brand of ether. This was not about to change. And there was no way to fit a piano into that room. Could I be a musician without an instrument?

After the crazy life in Võru, Tartu felt like a sanatorium. Besides general piano instruction, I was also responsible for supervising the pedagogical practicum of the pianists, and this fit very well with my modest ambitions. The more sedentary life was the greatest blessing. I now had time to read books, attend language courses, enjoy my hobbies, and sit with my friends in cafes. It was in the cafe that I met my first husband. Jüri Harak appeared in my life at a time when I was preparing to accept a lifetime as a spinster. At age thirty I had resigned myself to being single, but at thirty-one I was already engaged to Jüri. My intended had neither status, wealth, nor even higher education, but his letters were so rich, brimming with poetry, and grammatically impeccable, that they put my earlier highly educated admirers to shame. Jüri had no other talents besides loving. He had an open personality, a generous heart, a sense of humor, purity of soul, and a handsome appearance: he charmed all of my relatives and friends with this combination. Our life together was harmonious. Jüri began his studies, and in a few years he had obtained his diploma from the technical school in construction mechanics. Everything might have gone on that way, except...But let me take things in order.

There was nothing to ruin life like the famous apartment shortage artificially created by the Soviet regime. After I got married my husband and I went to live in a “pantry,” that is, a three and a half square meter room, since all the rooms in my parents-in-law’s single-family home were occupied. In that house there were three very large rooms, a spacious front room, and a kitchen (over 100 square meters altogether). In one of the rooms lived an old couple, in another my brother-in-law Tõnu, who had gotten married a year before to a woman with a two-year-old child. In the third room there were tenants, a family of three. My parents-in-law had bought that house along with the tenants. According to Soviet law, the tenants had the same rights as the owners, in reality, perhaps even more. One could only rely on people’s conscience. Luckily these tenants had a conscience, and only made us wait three years for a free room. Only then could we think about having a baby. And then tragedy struck.

I could never have dreamed that a place like the Tartu maternity hospital would be unable to give emergency assistance to a 36-year-old first-time mother. Perhaps no one wanted to bother. Unfortunately my baby suffocated during the long birth. The next time, in 1976, I was luckier with the hospital staff. Due to a scheduled Caesarean section, I gave birth to a healthy, lively, beautiful little daughter named Virge. At first we all took turns taking care of her, and when she turned four we enrolled her in kindergarten. As soon as the child went there, she started coughing. We were in desperate need of a place to spend the summer. In 1980 we got a good deal on half a house in Elva, the upper story usually used for vacationers. Our part of the house was unheated, and it was not possible to live there during the winter. Elva was a paradise for body and soul—warm lakes and pine woods, there the little girl’s health improved, and she learned to swim. But even though the house was rather new, a series of building defects emerged one by one, and these were very hard to fix. My husband had a constant load of work. And the time came when that house became a millstone around my neck, for very tragic reasons.

The death of our first child had been a serious trial for both of us. Jüri could not withstand it, and cracked under the burden. He started looking to alcohol for comfort, and, in summer 1985, he fell victim to his weakness. This was a total catastrophe. The darkest period of my life began. I had to raise a nine-year-old child on my own, and solve the vexed problem of a place to live. As I said before, nothing has

ruined my life as much as the artificial apartment crisis brought about by the Soviet regime. For 16 years I lived in the house of my parents-in-law, and I never dreamed that I would become a stranger there.

Tõnu got an apartment at around the same time as the tenants did. Only we and the old couple were left in the house. Life with them was harmonious. The old folks were kind to us, especially to our daughter. The grandfather referred to her as his heir, since this was their only blood grandchild. Unfortunately, though, these were only words. With Jüri gone and the grandfather dead for six years, the other heirs chose their moment to show their real faces. The grandmother, made apathetic by her anguish, faced a difficult choice: the family of the living son, or the family of the dead one. One of them had to leave the house forever. My dear mother-in-law, with whom we had always lived in peace and harmony, chose her living son. The document she signed meant that we would be evicted from the house. From that time on, life there became hell, both for us and for the grandmother.

I quickly had to trade my summer home for a cooperative apartment in Tartu, since it was not permitted to buy or sell apartments built with one's own money. Unfortunately such things cannot be done in a hurry. Things did not progress with our Elva house. At every turn I hit obstacles created by stupid Soviet laws. We kept spinning our wheels, as time went on, and the psychological terror intensified. I held out for a few years, and then came to the conclusion that it was dangerous to continue living in a place where anger, jealousy, and greed had concentrated so much negative energy. I had to flee that cursed house as fast as I could. I moved to my mother's, and I regret not having done this sooner. Less than a year passed before a solution came. I was offered a nice two-room cooperative apartment in Annelinn.⁵ The owner of the lower story of the Elva house also sold his portion, and we were happy to be rid of that "house of suffering."

Fate then began to bestow gifts on me, one after the other. I met a noble man who reached out a hand to help me at the most difficult hour. This man, who had golden hands, and a brain and a soul to match, was Ismar Nigula. Thanks to him, all my financial, practical and other worries were over. An apartment in Annelinn that I got through an exchange, and where I went to live with two people very

⁵ New residential area of Tartu on the opposite side of the River Emajõgi from the historic center of town.

dear to me, became a beloved nest for me. For once, a home of my very own, where I could enjoy a sense of privacy for the first time in my life. Ismar was a real treasure. It would be hard to tell that there was so much physical, moral, and spiritual strength in a man with such a modest appearance. The other amazing quality was his versatility. There were few areas in which this curious soul had not gained skills and knowledge, whether as a specialist or as an amateur. Ismar is a man of his word, and one could rely on him for support—he will not disappoint you. Life is never boring with him, as my husband enjoys surprising people. He has practiced many sports and has Master's titles in shooting and motorboat racing. The only vehicle of transportation he will acknowledge, however, is the bicycle.

My daughter Virge studied in the literature class of the Tartu High School No. VIII, and graduated from Tartu University in Slavic philology. She now works in the Tartu Courthouse as a translator.

In November 1991 we sent my mother to her final resting place. Half a year before her death she celebrated her 80th birthday. The Chinese acupuncture method that she had studied in 1957 in Moscow supplemented her day job as a physiotherapist. People would come from all over Estonia, and from even farther to get this kind of treatment, which was virtually unknown at the time. Mother's wish was to die quietly and suddenly, like a candle being snuffed out. Fate granted her wish.

My "little brother" Äрни graduated from the Estonian Agricultural College in Tartu in the field of mechanics, and did graduate work in Leningrad. He worked as a researcher in an institute in Saku, but when the Estonian Republic came, he started his own metal products manufacturing company. He is now living in Tallinn with his lovely wife and four children. It was a pleasant surprise to see metal grillwork produced in my brother's company decorating our new Market Bridge.

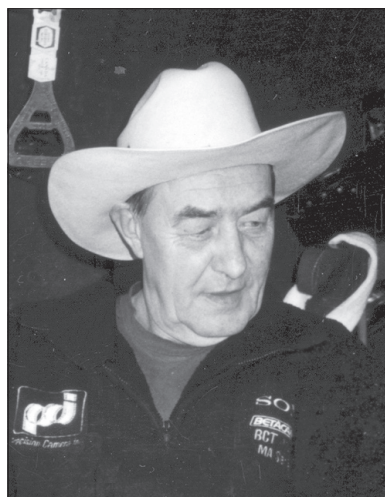
I have travelled through the landscape of my past. If a wizard appeared before me at the steering wheel of a time machine, and took me back to some period of my life, what would I choose? My childhood? By no means! It was awful, dangerous, and unhappy. My school years? Not these, either—they were difficult, harsh, and miserable. Neither do I want to see my youth again—this was too strenuous a time, with little to show for it, a time of great disappointments. There remain only the last years, with alternating jubilees. This is the only time I recall with excitement in my heart and a smile on my face. The patriotic pathos

of the Singing Revolution, demonstrations, meetings of the People's Front, the Baltic Chain⁶... All of this we passed through, my friend Ismar and I, enjoying these experiences in romantic harmony. It may come as a surprise, but I firmly believe that this time in my life has brought along the fewest disappointments. I am not disappointed in my reticent, mysterious companion. I also did not think the political crisis would solve itself so quickly, peacefully, and bloodlessly. Economic crises have not been able to shake us, either. I am glad that I have lived this very interesting time. Do I want to go back there? No! For a very simple reason. My most vivid impression of that time is the heady stream of fresh air that came from the open window of a prison—the hope of freedom. Today the walls of the prison have fallen down, and fresh air and freedom have become the natural condition of our lives, that we no longer notice or appreciate.

Not once did I go abroad during the whole Soviet period: the bureaucracy connected with foreign travel was too complicated and humiliating. I am happy that I took the opportunity to travel through the Republics of the Soviet Union. It was not until the spring of 1991 that I was able to travel to West Germany at the invitation of a women's association. Since then I have traveled to most of the countries of Europe, even Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt. I have especially enjoyed the fact that I could walk around as a free person, not as a miserable Soviet tourist, who does not even have enough money in her pocket to use the public toilet.

Until 2004 I worked in my beloved Eller Music School. I recall that it was exactly 60 years ago that I was taken to classes there for the first time, and I go there to this day. Is that not enough? One has to know when to leave school, just as one has to choose the right moment to leave the stage. I decided to retire. Now I take joy in life and relish my freedom. I asked Fate to give me health, for without it all of the world's other treasures lose their charm. At the moment I am at peace, but should things change. I will fight as best as I can. When I no longer can, I will give thanks for its loveliest gift to me—the sparks of happiness. I conclude with the works of the nightingale of the River Emajõgi, poet Lydia Koidula: "O brief life, you still hold me! Let my heart ring out with song!"

⁶ See Glossary for Singing Revolution and Baltic Chain.



Raimo Loo

BORN 1929

The story of my life began with my parents making a little mischief, as a result of which I came into this world on 5 December 1929, in Tallinn. We were living at the time in Helsinki, but my mother came to Tallinn to give birth to me. My father was working at the *Vesijohton Liike* in Helsinki, laying pipeline for the municipal waterworks, while he was also coach for the Finnish national wrestling team. But then

the times turned *paskased* as they said in Finland, and there was unemployment and financial shortages all over the world. Everyone was shouting “Work and bread!” When all of that happened my old man came back from Finland to “Mary’s Land.”¹ We found ourselves a roof to live under on the outskirts of Tallinn in Lilleküla, at the home of my maternal grandmother. Mother’s sister was also living there. We lived all piled up together like anchovies in a tin.

Father had neither money nor work, but my old man was not the type to go out in the streets carrying a red flag and making noise about it. One February night, when the moon was shining and the weather was as cold as a whore’s heart, my old man dressed me warmly, while he himself wore only a suitcoat and a tweed cap. He loaded me onto a sled and took off at a run. When we got to the top of a hill, my old man jumped on the sled too, and down we went, over and over again. My old man said “This is what you call Shrovetide sledding, boy!”² I was three years old at the time, and the other kids laughed at me for

¹ *Maarjamaa* (Mary’s Land).

² Shrovetide. Sledding on Fat Tuesday, the day before the beginning of Lent, was supposed to bring good luck, and ensure the fertility of cattle and fields.

speaking funny: I talked to them in Finnish, just like I did with the Finnish kids.

My mother's sister worked in Toru-Tõnisson's office, and somehow found my father a job. At that time they founded the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, located at No. 20 Pikk Street, just opposite the Russian Embassy. Toru-Tõnisson had central heating put in, and since my old man was working there, they let him live in the building for a year to make sure the heating and the pipes were working. So he became custodian-caretaker. Life was good again, just like a rose garden. Free rent, heat, electricity, and 100 kroons a month.

The loveliest memory of my childhood, and of the homeland in general, was spending time with my grandmother in Randvere. I must have been five or six years old. Every morning when the sun rose, the old lady heated the wood stove until it glowed, and had the pan sizzling. I was handed a basket and told: "The fishermen are coming." Sleepy-eyed, I took off for the beach. The men were just pulling the boat up on the shore. They threw some flatfish into my basket, and I ran back up the hill. The flatfish were still alive, but my grandmother's knife flashed like God's own lightning. What wonderful smells rose from that pan! Then it was time to run to the stable where the farmer's wife was milking the cow. I stood there next to the cat with a cup in my hand, both of us waited for our share of the stream of warm, foaming milk.

I was a city slicker. The Randvere village children did not like me at all. They took every chance they got to beat me up. Once three or four boys cornered me, their fists ready, "Now we'll let you have it!" I was so scared I stopped breathing. I bent down, picked up a few handfuls of sand and threw it in their eyes, kneed a few of them in the groin, and then put my great long legs to work. I hightailed it along the beach until I was completely out of breath.

Sometimes I would lie on my back on the beach for hours, watching the fast-moving clouds changing shapes in the sky. Grandmother would get quite worried when I had been away from home for a few hours. When I would come back covered with sea grass, sand, and mud, Grandmother would grab me by the hair, drag me to the well, muttering something about hogs. A few cupfuls of cold water, a stiff brush (there was warm water only on Saturdays when they heated the sauna), a slap on the behind, and off to eat. By then my eyes were

drooping, but I was not allowed to go to bed until I had knelt and said my evening prayers. The next day it would start all over again.

The last summer I was at Randvere I was taken along to drag in the nets. The sea was calm, with barely a gleam in the eastern sky, and two men were rowing. When they started to pull in the nets, the first rays of sunlight were already hitting the sea. The flatfish were like pieces of silver. Today I am an “old and tired man,” as the song goes, but that’s a morning I’ll never forget.

I spent the winters in town, where it was damned boring. Then I turned eight, took the pacifier out of my mouth, and off I was to school! It was goodbye to all the kid stuff: the jellyfish and the minnows at the beach; the hedgehog I used to take milk to in some corner of the woods; the cat I stole catnip for from Grandmother at the farm, and my great, powerful bow made out of umbrella wire.

I was enrolled in Tallinn Elementary School No. 1, located on Kooli Street, right behind the Gustav Adolf Gymnasium, where I was planning to go later, but Papa Stalin and Uncle Hitler sent all those dreams right to hell. That elementary school was also quite the place. A boys’ school. Bloody noses and black eyes every day. How did the teachers’ nerves hold up? They were like a second set of parents to us. We started the school day at 8 AM with the Lord’s Prayer and the Estonian national anthem, and lessons went on until three or four in the afternoon.

Homework was an ordeal. If you were thickheaded, you’d sit there at it all afternoon until it was time to go to bed, and in the morning you’d still be dull as an ox, until things got cleared up in class. I finished first grade during the Republic. Then the Russkies came, and I had to trade my nice dark blue scout’s tie for a red rag. The Tallinn Air Scouts had been in camp at the Viljandi airport when the Russian airplanes landed there. We were thrown out like excrement. My father was thrown out of Pikk Street, too. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry was turned into some kind of Komsomol school.

As I already mentioned, No. 20 Pikk Street was just opposite the Russian Embassy. We peered out from between our curtains and watched the workers march past there with their red rags, screaming. You didn’t see that kind of riff-raff walking around in daylight; who knows what sewer they crawled out of. Zhdanov (I think that was his name) was standing on the balcony of the Russian Embassy, and looked pretty damned pleased with himself.

In Nõmme we were crowded in and piled on top of one another, just as we had been in Lilleküla.³ We were joined by the Aring family, whom Tante Ida had saved from a cattle car just before crossing the border.⁴ Aring, who had owned a large iron shop in Tallinn, was a first-class capitalist and an oppressor of the working people—off to Siberia with him, right away! But the Russians liked culture, and Tante Ida knew how to sing opera, and so she sang the Aring family right out of the deportation train.

My father was the only one in the whole group who was working. He had a job in a trucking company, and all of us lived on his wages, to the extent that anything was available.

And then the “Fritz” came. They were welcomed with flowers and eggs. Father went back to Pikk Street. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry no longer existed, but the Germans turned it into “Rest and Recreation” (*Puhkus ja Elurõõm*).⁵ Since Father knew his way around the large building, he got his old job back. Things were fine as far as wages went, but what were we going to eat? The Germans distributed food stamps, but was there anything in the shops?

I was eleven years old, a very tender age, actually. I was sent to be a herding hand in Järvamaa, in the middle of nowhere at a forest warden’s farm. In the fall I was given, in return for my labor, five kilos of porkfat, five kilos of butter, a sack of potatoes and a sack of flour. That was a big help to the family, and I was as proud as a rooster in a dungheap behind the stable. The next summer they wanted to send me back to the same place. I put up a fuss: I was not going to go back to that hell! I was never allowed inside the farmhouse; like a dog, I was served my supper outside, and then I was told to go and sleep in the loft of the stable. The cows and sheep made noise all night long, and in the morning, at first light, I was on my way back to the pasture in the woods. Because of the fuss I made, I was sent to another farm, another forest warden’s place in Järvamaa. This was in Pillapalu village, where the Prime Minister had awarded wrestling champion Kristjan Palusalu with a farm. It must have been after the 1936 Berlin Olympics when the crowd shouted in Tallinn on Viru Street! “Palusalu, give

³ Nõmme and Lilleküla are suburbs of Tallinn.

⁴ First reference in the story to Raimo Loo’s father’s sister.

⁵ *Puhkus ja elurõõm* (Rest and Joy in Life) was an organization during the German occupation responsible for organizing leisure time activities for workers.

them hell, the Prime Minister promised you a farm.”⁶ Well, Palusalu did give them hell, and came home with two gold medals. So there I was, a little snotnose, watching by the side of the road as that powerful fellow plowed his field: the horse stepping lightly and calmly in front of the plow, was the old man pushing him? There was a story in Pillapalu village that once a horse and wagon had gotten stuck in the mud. Palusalu had unhitched the horse and pulled the wagon out of the mud with his bare hands. He supposedly said: “Pretty heavy, let that poor animal alone.”

So there I was on the road, jumping around like a sparrow, with the herd grazing on the other side. When Palusalu and his plow approached the road, I blurted out that my father was a wrestler, too. When he heard the name Loo, he stepped across the ditch, looked me right in the face and said, “You’re a Loo boy, all right.” He took my Finnish bowie knife, peeled a whole alder tree and made a horn out of it, saying, “A herd-boy always has to have a horn. But don’t tell the forest warden that I peeled the bark off the tree.” What was left of the peeled alder lay there by the side of the road like a skull.

Later that summer Father came from Tallinn on his bicycle. On the trains the German “chain-dogs”⁷ would confiscate all foodstuffs. My old man spent a few days at Palusalu’s place. After all, Kristjan was famous for his beer-brewing skills. They were both members of the Tallinn Sports Club, and surely they had a great deal to talk about. Meanwhile I kept my eye on the cows and the sheep so that they would eat their fill. The farmer’s wife stood by the pasture gate every evening: did the livestock get enough to eat? Did that city slicker take good care of them? I did my best. There is not much for a cow to eat in a state forest, anyway. I would drive the herd to the edges of the field and onto the hay meadow after the mowing. Once I met up with the herd from another farm, the herders were two sisters, one eleven and the other fourteen. To drain the land, ditches had been dug, and there were little bridges built over them. It was a hot day. I went to take a drink from one of the ditches, but the water had foam bubbles on top. The girls

⁶ Kristjan Palusalu (1908–1987), Estonian heavyweight wrestler, won two gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, and carried the Estonian flag at the opening ceremonies. (In Estonian, the couplet the crowd shouted is: *Palusalu, anna valu, riigivanem lubas talu!*).

⁷ “Chain-dogs” (*ketikoerad*), German military police.

were peeing on the other side of the bridge. The older girl had long legs, but I caught the younger one. Right there on the side of the ditch there were some nettle bushes, and I thrashed her legs with them; when I let her go, she howled like a wolf.

There was a local boy there, as well, from the other side of the Palusalu farm, and we would get together from time to time in the woods. One day he brought along a pack of German tobacco, and we rolled cigarettes out of newspaper and acted like big men. But we got bored with that, so we caught a ewe and blew smoke in its face. The sheep started staggering and fell down, with its two lambs bleating by its side. Meanwhile, it was getting towards evening, and time to drive the herd home. We agreed to say that the ewe had gotten sick. The farmer's wife was at the pasture gate as usual. She shouted, loud enough for all of Pillapalu village to hear, "Where is that ewe and her two lambs? You damned city thief, what have you done to my ewe?" And so we all went back to the woods, the farmer's wife and her two daughters, both as thick as gateposts. The ewe was right where we had left her. There was peace in the house for the next few days, until it came to light that the other boy had told his mother that the city boy blew smoke in the ewe's face. The farmer at my place happened to be sober that day, and gave me a long sermon. When I saw that boy on the road again, the stones flew, and Palusalu laughed till he was bent over, "Let it fly, boys!"

There are lots more stories from those herding days: when you're bored, you do all kinds of stupid things. I liked climbing up to the highest branch of a fir tree to take a crap, it was nice to watch it bouncing down the branches. I got along well with the animals; they minded me, and I did not have a dog. One hornless ram would come up behind me and push me into the ditch if he did not get enough bread. I doled out over half of my own bread to the herd. I told the farmer's wife that I was hungry, and she should give me more bread to take along. Then there was a nice bull calf, jet black and gleaming; we were great friends. When the other animals were still grazing, and the bull calf was full, he would lie down on his side to rest and I would curl up by its legs; I was constantly sleepy. When the herd moved on, the calf would wake me up, too. One Saturday morning they did not give me the bull calf to take to pasture. I did not know what to think, but I missed him. By evening I was tired, dusty, and famished. The Saturday evening sauna was tepid, just like the food that I ate every day standing up by the

table. I sat on the sauna ledge, trying to coax some heat out of the stones, the way a fox cooks bugs on last year's fire. Suddenly I glanced over at the corner of the sauna. There was the black bull's head. I don't know how long it lasted, but the whole universe stood still. Covered with soap, I ran sobbing across the yard to the stable and burrowed down in the hay; my supper was forgotten, and I cried myself to sleep. What damned sort of people were these? I collected my five kilos of this and that, but I did not go to the pasture any more.

I was about to turn fourteen, a pretty big fellow at that, in my last year of elementary school.

The German teacher was a sharp lady. She would never stop giving us trouble. In the corner of the classroom, behind the teacher there was a little sink. Lovingly and with great care we tied a condom to the faucet and left the water dripping slightly. The lesson began; everyone's eyes were on the sink. It filled up with water, which ran over the side of the basin, but when it finally burst, the old lady jumped. The school director was summoned; we had to stand up for four hours, and boy, did the old lady carry on. Some mama's boy may have wanted to squeal, but he knew what the next day would bring. Old Kangur, the school director, smirked into his beard. He was a man.

Back in those days life was exciting. The Reds came and went, and there were weapons and ammunition all over the place. We did some little "experiments," and some boys lost some fingers. We smashed the wall of the Kalamaja graveyard with fuses. And we picked some fights with the Kopli and Liivalaia boys. The Kalaranna boys were all over town, and that was where we learned the real Estonian language. Whatever else we were up to, we would never fail to offer a seat to the elderly in the streetcar, and helped carry their parcels in the street. We even smoked our German cigarettes behind a corner. Once an old greybeard snapped, "Look there, damn it, the piglet has a straw in his mouth!"

During the German occupation there was a law that if you wanted to go on from elementary school to high school, you had to work during the summer and prove it on paper in the fall. I got a job at the fox farm at the Keila manor. In those days human females who wanted to be worthy of the title "lady," felt obligated to wear a fox fur around their necks. There were blue foxes and silver foxes, as well as a small litter of pure white polar foxes. The work was not bad, better than herding at any rate. We dragged the carcasses together, cut them

up into pieces, and sent them through the big grinder. There were four of us boys, and we stank like polecats. In the evenings we would jump into the Keila River, and by bedtime we were clean again. The monthly wages were 40 German marks. It was the summer of 1944, with the Russkies pressing on and the Fritz retreating “victoriously.” The owners of the fox farm, a Tallinn lawyer and two other big thieves, turned themselves into Swedish-Estonians, and sailed off to Sweden with their purebred foxes. That night they brought in several crates of liquor, the *rabotniks*⁸ drank till they crawled on all fours, and by the next morning the gentlemen were gone and the manor empty.

Meanwhile it was getting toward the end of September 1944. Tallinn was in a panic, and people were pushing and shoving their way to the harbor. There were appropriate songs, too, such as “Everybody come along, Adolf Hitler calls us. Let us go on the big white ship to Germany to dig ditches!” Granted, the Germans had turned our lives to hell, but we were more scared of the Russians. My parents also decided that it was better to take off. I don’t remember any more whether it was the 22nd, the 23rd or 24th of September. There were two ships left in the harbour. One was called the *Moero*, a Red Cross ship, unarmed, with over 4,000 wounded soldiers on board, many Tallinn doctors, women, and children. The other one was the *Lappland*, bristling with cannon like a hedgehog. It was already evening, and it was dark out. The *Moero* pulled up its bridge from the pier. We barely made it onto the *Lappland* with our bags, before it, too, pulled off. After they were out of the harbor, for some unknown reason the ships stayed put for about two to three hours.

That was when I got the second “beating” of my life, just like in the sauna with the black bull. I stood at the railing and watched my home city burning; it was a sea of fire, all the way from the Pirita beach to the Kopli peninsula. The Germans were blowing things up with their mines, and the Russian bombers laying their eggs on top. There is no rage like impotent rage.

The next morning we were in the Gulf of Riga. It was already getting light when the Russian destroyers came. They had a hard time getting close to the *Lappland*, because the defense was strong, but the bombs landed so close that the water splashed into the hatches. The women were already howling, when a wounded soldier pulled out his

⁸ Workers.

accordion and started playing jolly tunes amidst all the uproar. The other soldiers were singing at the top of their lungs.

Well, we were lucky, but the *Moero*, which was ahead of us with its Red Cross, got a direct hit by an air torpedo, and 15–20 minutes later it had vanished. All those thousands of wounded, the women and the children were gone. Only about 300 people survived.⁹

The Russians do not recognize red crosses; all they know about is raw brutality, and the Germans are no better, as I had a chance to see later. We were put to shore in Danzig harbor, and were taken by rail to the outskirts of Berlin, to the Wilhelmsagen refugee camp. There was not much time to hang around: you had to work and win the war. We got a chance to go to Berlin once, and at a bank a young girl exchanged our worthless *Ostmarks* for German *Reichsmarks*. I have never been so rich in my life: a fourteen-year old snottose with 2,000 German marks in his pocket.

We rode on to Auerbach, a lovely little village in a mountain valley. Father's primadonna sister lived there. Ida's husband got along well with the Germans, so he had feathered his nest quite nicely. But we were not allowed to stay in that town: *Verfluchte Ausländer, raus!*¹⁰ Then we ran out of ideas. Where should we go?

We registered at the Labor Department and we were sent to Sudetenland to the banks of the Elbe.¹¹ This was the piece of Czechoslovakia that Uncle Aadu¹² had tucked under his arm. We were in a village only 65 kilometers away from Prague, where there was a labour camp and workers from thirteen different nationalities. We had to walk three kilometers to the underground factory in Litomerice to make airplane propellers. We had to be in the factory at six in the morning, and we got out at six in the evening. The workers' weekly rations were a two-kilo loaf of bread, 200 grams of sausage, 200 grams of margarine: eat it all at once, or divide it up among the seven days. At 5 AM we got black ersatz coffee made from acorns, and at lunchtime *Gemüse*¹³ was served at the factory, some kind of mashed mess of feed turnips. For

⁹ There are conflicting reports about the total number of passengers on the *Moero*, as well as about how many survived.

¹⁰ "Out, damned foreigners!"

¹¹ Along with the east European workers (*Ostarbeiter*).

¹² Adolf Hitler.

¹³ Vegetables.

the evening meal we got flour soup from the camp kitchen, but the flour was so old that it was full of big juicy worms. That was our meat ration. Mother threw up.

I was fourteen years old and wanted to go to school, but the leaders, our master race, said, *verfluchter Ausländer muss arbeiten*.¹⁴ So I became the janitor in the factory to the tune of twelve hours a day. Whether or not there was anything to sweep up, I kept my broom moving. Along with that broom, I also moved around to places where I was not really supposed to go. There were folks there with blue-and-white striped clothing, Jews, with a six-pointed star on their backs. They were so starved that they could barely stand up leaning against the wall. But one of the “engineers” would beat them just for the fun of it, wearing light leather gloves, bellowing the whole time, “Arbeiten, arbeiten!” Then I remembered the stories Grandmother used to tell me when I was a child, about how the serfs were beaten on their behinds with switches dipped in salt water.

In that labor camp they threw all the Estonians together, and there were 17 of us in one barracks. Double bunks along the walls, a small stove in one of the corners, but there was neither firewood nor coal to heat it with, and even less food to cook on it. In the hallway, a WC and washroom, where we got cold water. In the middle of the room a big, long table. The evening entertainment, which almost turned into a competition, was combing out lice with a lice comb onto a piece of white paper: whoever had the most would be the winner, but there were no prizes. We also had clothing lice, a different breed from head lice. The wooden bunks were infested with bedbugs and the blankets were lice-ridden. But after twelve hours of work and six kilometers of walking, even rats could have gnawed on us, but there were none of them there, since there was no garbage for them to eat.

The winter of 1944–45 came with a deep frost. Even the fast-flowing Elbe River froze solid. We had no heat, but 17 people crowded closely together provided some warmth. Sunday was our only day off. My job was gathering kindling. I would walk along the riverbank carrying a potato sack, and every last scrap of wood got put in the bag; I would even break off branches from bushes and saplings. The fire was smoky and crackled a lot, but it was better than nothing.

¹⁴ “Damned foreigner has to work.”

There was a woman there named Lulli, with her daughter. What a spunky lady! She pestered my mother to go with her to the other side of the river to get some food. On the other side of the river were rich Czech farmers. Since there were no guards at the camp or by the river (guards were only posted on the railway bridge), the women took off across the ice like a couple of bandits when everyone else was asleep. They took along linen bed sheets and pillowcases, and thick silk-padded blankets they had brought from Estonia; once they even hauled a big woollen floor carpet decorated with Estonian patterns. They made many trips, and were able to get some potatoes, flour, a little bit of butter and bread, even a little pork. That was a big help. But they were well aware of what would have happened to them if the border patrol had gotten their hands on them.

Lulli worked in a fish canning factory. In December, when I turned fifteen, Lulli brought me a herring for my birthday, carrying it in her bosom. Never in my life, before or since, have I had such good herring. And Lulli would have been shot if they had caught her.

We somehow managed to survive that horrible winter. Spring came early in those parts. The ice on the Elbe melted in April, and the river flooded: the water almost came right up to our barracks. When the water level went down again, fish were left behind in some of the shallower places. The nights were still cold, and the fishpools covered with ice. In the morning, when it was scarcely light out, Father and I would go out with clubs in our hands to hit the fish over the head through the ice. Mother made good soup out of them, though there was not enough butter to fry them with. Once I even caught a small eel, and for that, sure enough, we found something to grease the pan with; I divided my catch with Mother and Father and my older sister, everyone got a mouthful.

In May the “comrades” arrived.¹⁵ The whole camp took off for the west ahead of them. We would have gone, too, but my two younger sisters had just caught the measles, and their fever was above 40 degrees. There was no medicine besides aspirin, and even that was probably brought along from Estonia.

When the Reds came, all hell broke loose, and everything was open to the public. For three days there was absolutely no order, you could do whatever you wanted. On the other side of the bridge in the

¹⁵ The Red Army.

village of Lobožice there was a chocolate factory and a tobacco warehouse. With a Polish boy a few years older than me, we brought back pillowcases full of biscuit flour. Then we hightailed it over the bridge to the tobacco storehouse, where there were huge 50 kilo packages of light and dark tobacco leaves. I brought back so much that even in the Swedish refugee camp Father's pipe was packed with it. The Germans were supposed to hang white flags from their windows and wear white armbands. The Czechs were paying them back in kind, since the Germans had made the Poles wear a huge P on their backs, and the Ukrainians the word "Ost." The other nationalities had to wear their national colors on their chests.

For those three days without law and order, drunken Russian soldiers combed through all the houses marked with white flags. The neighboring village rang night and day with women's howling. After that the Czechs restored order. The Germans were packed into open cattle cars and sent back to Germany. I remember one drunken Russian soldier who had at least six wristwatches up and down each arm. He was so proud of himself, like a rooster sitting on a dungheap behind the stable.

As citizens of the "great homeland" we were lodged in an apartment belonging to a leather factory. The Germans had just been evicted from there: even the dishes were still on the table. It was a miserable feeling somehow. Mother cried, and Father smoked up a storm. Father and I worked in that factory until the Russians started making life bitter for us.

My father's older brother, Voldemar, got to Sweden under the guise of being an Estonian Swede, and Father knew his address in Stockholm.¹⁶ The postal system was in good working order, and Uncle Volli got the wheels turning to get us all to Sweden. I was the only one who knew some German, so that it was the 15-year old snotnose who had to pay a visit to the Swedish consulate in Prague. I went there three times, and I must say that Prague is a beautiful, historic city, prettier than Stockholm.

After the third trip we had our visas, and all we needed was a stamp in our passport, the exit permit from Czechoslovakia. I was happy, but the folks at home were in a panic. A Czech policeman and two

¹⁶ A similar attempt was made by Heljo Liitoja, but unsuccessfully (see Heljo Liitoja's life story).

Russians had come by to tell them that on Sunday at 12 we had better be in the train station, to start the journey back to the “great homeland” with the Russian troops. The Czechs were trying to keep order, but the power was in the Russians’ hands. My mother was the only one among us who knew some Russian. She went to town to get the passports stamped. The Czechs did not dare give her the stamp, so she was sent to the Russian officer, Colonel Kurnikov. The man himself was not in his office, only an adjutant, who probably got tired of the old lady’s noise and stamped the passports to get her out of his hair. In order not to have to appear on Sunday at 12, we left at 6 AM on the first train to Prague. We left Mother with the younger children in the train station, and Father and I went together to the Swedish consulate. It was a quiet Sunday morning, with the streets empty and no one out and about. We knocked on the door of the consulate until they finally opened it for us. Luckily there happened to be a Swedish Red Cross captain there, who was organizing the transportation of German social democrats to Sweden. He accompanied us to the train station, bought tickets for us all to Pilsen, which was in the American zone, and came along himself. At the border crossing into the American zone the train was stopped, and the Russians checked everyone’s papers. We held our breaths. The Swede took our passports, talked with the Russians, and there we were, across the border, able to breathe freely again.

We spent two weeks in the Pilsen camp waiting for the Red Cross transport to Sweden. The Pilsen camp was one of those places where they had put a lot of people to “sleep,” and it was very spooky somehow. Then the Red Cross transport arrived: seven buses, a gravy train, and supply vehicles. It was already late December. We also passed through Nuremberg, past the courthouse where the war criminals were hanged. In my young stupid head I kept thinking, why do they not hang the Russkies? But who the devil understands politics? We were still on our way on Christmas Eve. Children under ten were given an orange. My three sisters did not know what to do with them, and my older sister dug her teeth into it and said, “how bitter.”

We got to Denmark, and were immediately sent to delousing, even our clothes and our luggage.... and then it was across the strait to Sweden. Delousing once again. They took all our clothes away completely and gave us completely new outfits, from underwear to winter coats.

How nice and bright Sweden seemed after dark Germany, bombed to smithereens. The shop windows were full of goods. In 1939 the

Russians must have had the same feeling when they took over Estonia, washing their faces in the toilet bowls and going to balls in nightgowns.

For a few weeks we were quarantined in a lovely resort facility, and then we were sent north to refugee camp. Barracks again, but this time they were comfortable and heated, and there was more than enough to eat.

I had brought along some German military paraphernalia, SS-insignia, and other such trash, to the extent that we were allowed to bring it across the border. The Swedish boys took a keen interest in it. I did not know the language yet, but I managed to trade some of that German trash for a pair of skis. I had never been on skis before, but I learned quickly. It was a good thing I did not break any bones or my skis, either. For days on end I was in the woods, skipped many a noonday meal, and by evening I was as ravenous as a wolf. That cold, wintry forest was so soothing somehow, and it felt good to be alone.

In those days (and maybe even now) there were many large landholders in Sweden, barons, as it were. Father got a job as a lumberworker and woodchopper in one of those manors. A few weeks later we joined Father. Just as in any other manor, farm hands had their own huts, but these huts were nice and comfortable. Ours even had a second floor room. There were many Estonians there. We chopped wood, and were only allowed to take down trees the forest warden had marked. The worst were the twisted birch trees, and the stunted firs and pines. I was now sixteen years old, tall and skinny as a rail. Sometimes I cried from rage when the wedge got stuck in the tree trunk; I'd add another one, and it would still be stuck. But I finished the allotted two meters a day—and that meant ten crowns.

Estonians are the sort of folks who always have to have a drop of liquor handy, otherwise they might get worms in their bellies. In those days there was no way to get liquor in Sweden, not even for gold. You had to have a steady job, and a letter of certification that you were a well-behaved slave. Then you had to go to the pastor to beg for a second letter, proof of moral uprightness. With those two letters in hand, you were entitled to a liter a month, provided you were at least 25 years old. What's a liter a month to an Estonian? Like stork shit in the middle of an ocean. But Estonians have always been pretty clever and out to defend themselves in all sorts of situations. Someone stole a 50 liter milk container, somebody else brought a big pot with a lid, a third one tinkered with the pipes a little, and the "apparatus" was complete.

Those drops of life-giving elixir that dripped from those pipes were as clear as well water, but you had to watch out that you didn't get close to them with a lighted match.

I was in Sweden for five years, working in the woods at first, then in the foundry with my father. That's where he stayed. Then I was in the Eskilstuna municipal dairy for three years as an apprentice. I learned how to make cheese and butter, and how to pasteurize milk—three long years on low wages.

I adored my father, and did not want to be a lesser man than he. I trained hard at the Eskilstuna boxing club, and we went to the city to fight; in 1950, after three days of thrashing around in Stockholm, I took the Swedish youth master's heavyweight title for the Eskilstuna boxing club. I was quite a guy, and the women and the liquor followed. The dairy trade school wanted over 1,000 crowns for tuition, and my girl from that time went off to Canada. I went to the Canadian consulate in Stockholm, with not a cent to my name. They were very friendly to me there, and claimed that my kind of muscle was just what they needed in Canada. They promised me a free ride, which I would later have to pay back. We pulled out of Oslo, and on 3 May 1951, I landed in Canada, in Halifax, carrying two suitcases, with five American dollars and ten gold czarist era rubles in my pockets.

I knew as much English as a pig knows about Sundays. One of my good friends had arrived in Toronto a few months earlier, and I slept on his porch. Everybody was poor in those days. The Russian gold came in handy. A friend of a friend who knew the language took me to the employment office, and I was shipped off to the cheese factory in London, Ontario. I have seen lots of places, but nothing that even came close to this. To this day I will only eat European cheese, since I have not seen with my own eyes how they make it. Dictionary in hand I went to inquire into how much pay I would be getting. "Come back next week." The work was from six in the morning to six in the evening, seven days a week. The pay was three dollars and fifty cents a day, minus room and board. That left about two dollars. Once I was given half a day off, and I went to visit another Estonian in London, Ontario, whom my friend had introduced to me by mail. After I told him how much money I was earning, he told me straight to my face, "Boy, you've been had!" I quit right then and there.

In London I took a job moving a shovel, for a dollar an hour, and that was big money. The rent for the room was cheap, but one wasn't

allowed to bring in girls or food. There wasn't any money for girls anyway; I was still hungry, and most of my money went to the cafeteria. Then St. John's Eve came. In Toronto they were holding an Estonian Summer Festival (which meant open-air drinking). I met up with a boy from the island of Vilsandi; we had been logging together in Sweden. He had come here ahead of me, and was already an "old" Canadian lumberman. He waited for me in Toronto, while I cleared my affairs up in London, and then we were off to northern Canada. A new and interesting chapter of my life began.

In Camp Stevens, there was a large American firm chopping down Canada's forests. The Camp, or barracks, rather, was a two-story building, complete with electricity, warm and cold water, like a hotel. About 120 men worked there. Half of them were truck drivers, tractor-drivers, or other award-winning losers. There were no motorized saws back then, and we felled trees with a small saw and an axe, up to our bellies in snow. We had to chop the tree to eight feet in length, and make piles fifty inches high and fifty inches wide. That was one cord of wood, which brought in five dollars.

The forest was poor, anyway, with thin trees; it was like chopping long grass. The Vilsandi fellow won 1,500 dollars from the French playing dice. And so we took off. The boy bought a brand-new car. And did he ever have girls after him—Estonians, Finns—we poor ones had to rely on social aid, which meant brothels.

It was fun driving from one lumber camp to another looking for better woods. The back seat of the car was always full of beer and liquor crates, and I could barely squeeze in between them. Not that it was all drinking and driving, because we worked, too, like young devils. We had the strength, and the saw kept whizzing through the wood. But then some girl hooked the Vilsandi boy, car and all. And our gang fell apart.

I was left alone in a Finnish camp, but I was thrown out of there, with the promise to put a *puukko*¹⁷ on my back because a married woman started hitting on me. And so I got back on the wooden bench of the train, rode for three days and nights, until the train had nowhere further to go. I was in Vancouver, on the shores of the Pacific. A nice town, but there was no work there for anyone without higher education. But there has never been a real Harju man who ends up a loser.

¹⁷ A curse in the form of an evil spirit.

I found myself a foundry, where they were making wastewater pipes, and there was a gang of Estonians there. In the spring the city didn't need any more pipes, and the factory closed up shop.

It must have been in the year 1953 that they started building a large aluminum plant in Kitimat, north of Vancouver. Twenty or so kilometers on the other side of the mountains, about 3,000 feet above sea level was Kemano Falls, where they were building a hydroelectric station. In order to drive the electric lines over the mountains to Kitimat, the Estonian boys pitched in again. We lived in tents, moved on along with the work, and wiped the mountains clean as with a broom. It was piecework, so in three months I made well over 2,000 dollars. Afterwards I rode an airplane back to the forests of northern Ontario and spent a few more months cutting down trees.

I was 23 years old by this time, and starting to think about the meaning of life. Once again I got back on the train and went back to Toronto. It really was difficult to be alone in a strange land. Sure, you could learn the language, but the accent would stay, and they would ask you right away, where do you come from? It tired me out so much, that sometimes I would answer, "I come from my mother; do you even have one, you son of a devil?" That would sometimes lead to a scuffle.

I got a job in another dairy, again through connections.

In those days there was no Estonian House yet. Lots of Estonian young people would go dancing at the Hungarian House, showing themselves off and looking around, just like the old crones do nowadays in the Estonian church. There in the dance hall of the Hungarian House I met my wife. Tall, willowy, slender, like a Baltic herring. Flaxen-haired, with laughing blue eyes. She was a seventeen-year-old spark, from the tip of the Sõrve peninsula. It was love at first sight, and it was clear immediately that we belonged together. The wedding was four months later, in July 1954.

Now we have been together for almost 44 years, plowing the same field like a team of oxen. For the last few years we have been pensioners. For the last 28 years I worked in the Toronto Transit Commission, driving streetcars, buses, even a subway towards the end. It was nerve-racking work, but the pay was good for someone who did not have much education.

So here I am with my Sõrve woman, under my own roof, in a warm room with bread on the table, sometimes even a bottle of stomach medicine. What more could a person wish for? Every now and then

our big boys will come and visit. I have never looked up at anyone, but my boys are taller than I am, and I have noticed that my pants have somehow gotten longer. My older son is already 42, working in a film company. The younger one is 32—a cop, a Canadian Mounted Policeman with a scarlet coat. His soul cannot bear sitting at an office desk; there has to be open sky above his head, and he has to be able to hunt, fish, and chase criminals. I am not sure I will ever see any grandchildren, and perhaps the Loo name will die out. My older son's marriage went on the rocks, and the younger one, whose wife is also a cop in a red jacket, does not want any children. Money is dearer than wiping a baby's bottom. I don't understand today's youth. So, I watch television, read newspapers and books, and try to understand how stupid this world has gotten. I tinker around the house, walk the dog, and am prepared every day for the Grim Reaper. I've done enough, seen enough, been around enough.

Veni, vidi, vici?

I have had no more contact with my homeland, my dear Estonia, since the day we fled there from the Reds in 1944. Papa Stalin made sure that all of my relatives died in Siberia. The few who escaped are dead by now, gone to better hunting grounds.

Here in Toronto there are more Estonians than there are spotted dogs, even more than my wife has relatives. Life would be great, except my wife's relatives sometimes spoil things. It is many years ago now that we went to the Toronto Estonian Students New Year's Ball. The tickets were pricey, but the tables were covered with all sorts of foods, countless bottles of liquor and champagne. The gentlemen wore tuxedos and bowties, the women long evening gowns. The speeches were half in Latin, half in Estonian. Some crazy person walked around waving a fraternity sword brought along from Estonia, promising to go and set Estonia free. Everyone's talk was so polite and genteel that I concluded it was a wasted New Year's Eve. But a few hours later the tuxedo tails were torn and the bowties crooked. One lady was dancing on the table, and the gentlemen drank champagne from a high-heeled shoe; that was supposed to be a university student tradition. I can tell them where to put that one! I have quite a dirty mouth, if I don't say so myself but I was no match for those "educated" ones. Then my wife said in a quiet voice, "Let's go home now."

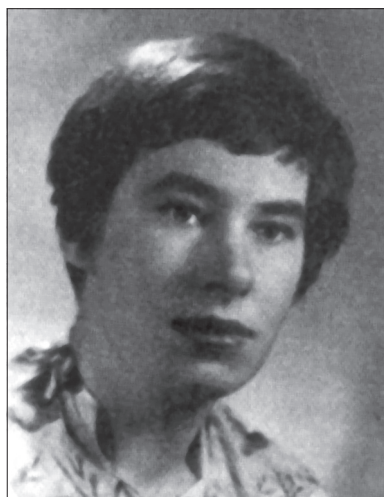
And now I come back to the topic of the Estonian House. A few years ago my son wrote that his coffee mug with the Estonian crest on

it had broken. Christmas was coming and it was foul weather. I pulled on my long boots, put on my lumberman's jacket, a knitted wool cap, and made my way to the Estonian House. There is a shop there on the first floor where they sell Estonian handicrafts at horrendously high prices. There happened to be two gentlemen and a lady gossiping there. Furs, patent leather shoes, karakul hats and collars, white shirts and ties. They put their heads together and hissed like a nest of vipers. I will never set foot in that place again. Damned dandies and tattletales! In the old days in Estonia, they were up to their knees in cowdung, leather shoes crooked on their feet, but now oh, so high and mighty. What makes me angriest is that now those folks are demanding their farmland back from the Estonian government. Before they were making their own Estonian governments, in Sweden and Canada, squabbling among themselves the whole time. What kind of a damned crowd are we, anyway? I piss on the shoes of the likes of those.

I don't care for the pastors, either, they're a bunch of lazy scoundrels; once a week they put a white shirt on backwards, and then blab on and on from the pulpit about totally irrelevant things. I don't want to have anything to do with it. The worst illnesses of humanity, the really deadly diseases, are religion and politics. I have a book called the *Kalevipoeg*.¹⁸ If I want to connect with the real force, I sit with my back against an oak tree and feel the power streaming through me.

PS. Excuse my foul mouth, but having worked together with Finnish Boys and men from the Estonian Legion, I caught some of what they had; this is real life, the way the real people talked.

¹⁸ Estonian national epic, see Glossary under *Kalevipoeg*.



Aili Valdrand

BORN 1936

My name is Aili Valdrand. I was born in 1936 in Saaremaa, on a small holding. My maternal grandfather kept the estate store, across the street from the estate tavern; that is where our family name—Poe—comes from. The store was burned to the ground in 1905, so Grandfather hastily built a new house in one summer, where he then set up shop. His daughter Linda—my mother, that is—found herself a quirky

husband who wanted to farm, and bid farewell to shopkeeping. That is the kind of house we lived in, then—shuttered windows, a shop counter on one end, a few rooms in the other.

My father, Kaarel Valdrand, was a tall, talkative man, with a bent for sarcasm. He worked hard himself, and demanded the same from others. He kept a herd of red purebred cattle, and tilled the heavy clay soil using proper agricultural techniques, plowing a field for himself out of the manor pasture. There was no prayer in our house. Mother said that to a farmer, God was two strong, alder-bark-colored horses who had to be given tender, loving care, in order to make sure the fields were kept in order. I am the sixth child in my family. My sister is sixteen years, my brother thirteen years older. The children in between all died; just as Krõõt of Vargamäe succumbed to hard work, my mother lacked the strength to bring all six children into the world alive.¹

¹ Krõõt of Vargamäe is the wife of Andres, the protagonist of A.H. Tammsaare's classic novel, *Truth and Justice* (*Tõde ja Õigus*). The novel begins with Krõõt and Andres arriving at Vargamäe, their own farm, where Andres will fight to drain and till the poor, swampy land. Krõõt dies giving birth to her fourth child.

One of our neighbors was a nasty sort of fellow. He, too, had been given a small holding from the estate lands when they were divided up. His farmstead was referred to as “the pride of the county,” but its eldest son was twisted like a ram’s horn. While still a bachelor, he had gone to St. Petersburg as a construction worker, and mastered drinking and dancing the *kamarinskaja*. At home he did nothing but drink and father children. Thus the area around the Angla windmills in Saaremaa could boast of at least one classic pair of neighbors, just like Oru Pearu and Mäe Andres.²

My brother was born in 1923. He was often ill as a child, resulting in permanent damage to his ears. During the war his enterprising father tried at all costs to exaggerate the trouble to keep the one person capable of continuing his life’s work from becoming cannon fodder. But the “county pride” boys took to the forest; they didn’t take part in either war, neither the Russian nor the German one.³ Since Kaarel Valdrand had once made a quip about the neighbors’ boys—that they came down from the mountain as quietly as they went up—the boys in the forest held a grudge against us, promising to let us have it when the Russians came back. My father fled across the sea with my brother in 1944. The “county pride” boys couldn’t believe their neighbor could have slipped out of their grasp like that. And the two of us, my mother and I, were held responsible. In 1947 we were listed as *kulaks*.⁴ Thus my carefree childhood ended in August, 1944, when my mother and I were left to manage the farm alone together.

My sister got married, to a man who couldn’t father children. While I was small, she satisfied her maternal instincts by fussing with me. She wanted me never to grow up. But I did, and since after that I was out of her grasp for 9 years, she grew to hate me by the time I came back from Siberia. That was our family’s great misfortune, since work was my sister’s God, and the fruit of her labors she bestowed on strangers. *Kulaks* were saddled with high government production quotas. My mother had to do the work of several people. At age eleven

² Another reference to Tammsaare’s *Truth and Justice*. Pearu, whose land was in a valley, and Andres (mentioned above), whose land was on a hill, were archetypal neighbors, frequently at odds with one another. Of the two, Pearu was a trickster, and Andres the hardworking serious element of the pair.

³ The reference is to the succeeding occupations during World War II.

⁴ *Kulaks*, see Glossary.

I had to harvest oats. I wasn't allowed to go to bed at night—I vomited, and spent that night sleeping on my knees. If we hadn't been able to meet the quotas, my mother would have been sent off alone to the camps, and my life would have turned out quite differently.

There were bright spots in my childhood, too. I did well at the village school I attended. There were poetry and plays; I was among the best in sports. Our other neighbor had a daughter named Ella, five years older than me. She quite literally shaped my spirit. (May she rest in peace! She died of cancer at age 60.) On Saturday evenings we would gather helleborine, and the lovely ladyslipper, flowers of the orchid family that are now listed in the *Red Book*.⁵ Ella transported us village children to the magic world of flowers. She taught us the new postwar songs, *The Island of Capri*, and *Far in the East, in the Deep Forest*—the ones Ivo Linna sings today. It seems to me that I lived out my Estonian maidenhood before the age of twelve. My actual young womanhood passed in a totally different part of the world, in different circumstances. But in 1948 the swing shared by the surrounding villages was right at the end of our field in the alder woods. On balmy August nights I would steal away unbeknownst to mother to go to the gathering “under the swing.”⁶ In the evenings a much older boy would come to ask me out to dance. Afterwards, I would run home through the dew covered fields. I had no idea then of the real meaning of “going under the swing.”

In April of 1949, my mother and I set foot on Siberian soil. We had been deported from our homeland—permanently and forever.⁷ We were taken to a dairy *sovhoz* near the city of Tatarsk.⁸ Thirteen people, seven of them children, crammed into a room 25 meters square. Lice, bad food—the whole works. The story has been told, many times over. My mother was 52 years old when we arrived.

The teacher of the four-grade elementary school thought that a smart girl like me could manage fifth grade in the *sovhoz* center's school 22 kilometers away. But I stayed in my village and never got to school at all. We had planted potatoes with a shovel, but didn't realize

⁵ A botany handbook, presumably listing endangered plant species.

⁶ An Estonian village custom.

⁷ The 25 March 1949 deportations, intended to enforce collectivization of Estonian agriculture, see Glossary under Deportations.

⁸ *Sovhoz*, see Glossary.

the proper time to hoe them. So I had no food to take to school with me. In the winter, when the other village children were at school, I was the only one who stayed at home; I learned how to knit sweaters. A fierce-looking man came to register state loans. I barely understood what he was saying, only that I had to sign something. I signed for a very large amount. My mother was in despair. Estonians, of course, wanted to pay it all back, according to the letter of the law and the dictates of conscience. I had to go to work in 1950, at the age of thirteen years and five months. I worked in that same *sovhoz* until the 1st of April 1958. But actually my work-slavery lasted without a break until October 1991, when I turned 55. Our own nation counted it as 59 working years.⁹ By now I feel I have been completely worn down, like a sliver of soap. They wouldn't give me "invalid status" while I was working. I still had both arms and both legs, but an invalid has to have missing parts. But today I can only get around with the help of a cane. I am even hurrying to finish writing my life story, because soon I may not be able to move my right hand.

We did all kinds of work in the Siberian *sovhoz*. At 49 below freezing we hauled water to the barns with a team of oxen. There is a great deal to be written about all of that; I have recorded some of it, too. People need to be told what lifelong forced labor was all about. One afternoon when I was 15, I was so tired during haying that I fell asleep next to a haystack. I got a whipping—the scars are still there on my legs.

Work was required, but no one paid us any wages. I learned how to shirk. The women deported from Estonia were assigned to milking. I found life at the tail end of a cow very boring. When they swore at me, I returned the favor. Later they didn't bother me with milking jobs. Riding between the warehouse and the grain elevator I saw more of life. I bought myself a radio—an electric one; electricity was free for *sovhoz* workers. Thanks to the radio and newspapers sent from home, and *Soviet Woman* magazine, I could keep up a little with what was happening in Estonia. But growing up alongside Russian children I picked up some of their attitudes, their view of life. I did not become completely russified, since the level of culture in my home was higher. I did learn group singing in harmony, though. Lots of films were shown: we could see Western films taken as war booty. The club

⁹ In the Estonian republic after 1991, pensions of those returned from Siberia were compensated for the "years of repression."

was close to us, only 150 steps from our tiny room. But 40-below-zero cold can impede dancing the *tsyganotska*, even in felt boots and a winter coat down to your ankles. Often a group of young people would get together in my room. We sat on the beds, with a meter's space between them. We talked about films, about our homeland's latest achievements. In Khrushchev's time, life suddenly got better, with the campaign to "claim the virgin soil." A song from that era told how young builders were sent from the Volga-Don region to the Ob River to pour concrete. The Volga "awaited big feats from the Ob, and the Ob responded."

Our little room was in the middle of the house, separated from the others by a wall made of boards. A girl lived in the other room; some of my visitors eventually landed in hers. In our room, smoking was not allowed, and the boys had to take their caps off. That winter my mother worked as a night watchman in the pigsty, and I hauled water to the barns on the day shift. A few times a night Mother would come home to bring food for our animals. I left the door unlatched so I wouldn't have to get up to let her in. Once the crowd of young people had noticed that the door was unfastened, and 18-year-old Shura Iljushin had come in. I awoke to someone groping my breasts. Half asleep, I grabbed the arm with both my hands and pushed it forcefully away. I heard moaning and swearing, "You dog! What do you mean, coming after me with a knife! *Estonka bezdonka!*" I recognized a familiar figure in the room. The boy was clutching one hand in the other. I jumped out of bed. "Shura, I did not hit you with a knife!" My door banged shut, the boy quickly slipped out next door, and there was a chorus of laughter. Some girl tried to bind the wound, to them it looked like saw marks, not a knife. The Estonian girl left her door unlatched, but she had a saw under the covers to protect herself.

I lit the lamp and saw blood on the floor. On my makeshift packing crate table stood the package that had arrived the day before, its top overturned, with the nails pointing up. A 3 cm nail can make a pretty good hole in a hand if you hit hard. Iljushin, that sweet-voiced village singer, walked around for a week with a bandaged arm. I heard they had all agreed that Aliska would give Shura a warm welcome, and they would all be listening on the other side of the thin wall.

When I was about to go back home to Estonia, Shura was in the army. His mother came to say farewell and told us that they had been deported in 1937. Half the village had been brought to Siberia from

Russia, but no one dared to talk about that. Maybe they were related to the airplane builder Iljushin who gave Russia the "I-I" plane. They were a bright lot, too.

But we were always on the lookout for more of our own people. The years passed, and we blended in with the locals. I could not get my school and my old playgrounds, overgrown with juniper, out of my mind. Once I heard that there were some Estonian young people in the *kolkhoz* village, and that their little boy could hardly speak Estonian. I went to a place near there to get new felt boots made. That Estonian family's house was on the way, right by the side of the road. I stopped in on a stormy winter day. I must have spoken Russian without an accent, because they didn't take me for an Estonian. As I was leaving, my hand already on the latch, I said in Estonian, "Aha, this boy doesn't want to admit to speaking Estonian!" Then I left; later I heard they had taken me for a "stiff-necked island girl." But it was the time when people were liberated, who knows where they all went.

During our time in Siberia I had to be the master of the house, the head of the family. My mother was smart; she had the wisdom of life experience, and a good soul, but we would have been treated unjustly too often. One time I had to box the ears of two Russian women one right after the other to protect my mother. She was too submissive, after 23 years of being in the shadow of a man with strong character.

Here is what happened one time: the houses in the village were in a row, and people kept livestock. We had lambs and goats. In the fall a woman from the *kolkhoz* moved in with us. She kept her cow in the front hall, tied to the doorhandle. That old woman was poor and quarrelsome. Some twenty paces from our barn there was a stack of very good hay that belonged to a well-to-do family. One time the woman from that family came to our barn, following the trail of torn-out tufts of hay, and cursed my mother out for thieving. My mother showed her the hay in our manger. The visitor understood her mistake. To keep her from slandering my mother in the future, I slapped her a few times across her red face. Then it occurred to me to look at our neighbor's manger, and I found the stolen hay there. That day the *kolkhoz* woman got a taste of the tough hands of an islander. Is that barbaric? Try and live in a world like that! At any rate, this was a clearer and more straightforward settling of accounts than our half-red "prominents" are in the habit of doing nowadays!

Russia is a rich country; give it a little time to recover and it will come and start persecuting us again. When they plowed up the Baraba steppes, there was an amazing amount of wheat! But there were no shelters to store it in, so it all rotted. The people were under a reign of terror, enslaved to stupid leaders; one couldn't use one's head to organize one's life.

In the fall of 1953 we saw an aboveground nuclear explosion nearby. We might even have been exposed to radiation. There was a strange light in the sky; even the oxen turned their heads in the direction of the light. It rose from below, turned into a dark, menacing, mushroom-shaped cloud, stood still for a few minutes and then started to disperse. We stood there watching, not knowing what else to do, thinking it was some natural phenomenon. I have seen such things later on in films, with the explanation that this is what a nuclear explosion looks like.

At any rate, my mother got used to life's necessities in Siberia. I was one of two girls in the village who, when riding at full speed, did not fall off an ox's back. The other one was an Estonian girl too. We had no choice; we had to work in the meadows with a hay-dragging contraption, and we had no way of driving the oxen except to ride on their backs. All of the other Estonian women, except for one, learned how to climb up on an ox's back, and that meant they rode home from the meadow without getting footsore. My mother was light; even at the age of 54 she could jump up and straddle an ox, boosting herself up on its front leg. There were no reins to guide the animals, nothing but a stick. If you weren't sitting on the animal's back you had to walk beside the dragging machine, alternating sides. Only one poor, plump elderly woman from Sõrve was willing to put up with that hassle.

If I had to be the stern master of the house, my mother was its caring, nurturing mistress. We were in the meadows making hay around the clock. Soup was made from odds and ends—a few peas and *puslamasla* (vegetable oil margarine) browned with onions.¹⁰ In the summertime mother often worked in the village; the best food in the world was the boiled potato she sent us with gravy (*nott*) made from flour sent from Saaremaa. Life is a wonder! Sometimes we had extremely salty kipper to go with our fish. The *gorbusa*, of course, belongs to the

¹⁰ *Puslamasla* was a foreign taste for Estonians who were accustomed to fry their food with butter or pork fat. Many life stories refer to this shift in type of cooking fat.

salmon family, but it is as big as a regular piglet. Once the Sõrve woman was coming from town carrying half of a fish like that in a potato sack; she got caught in a storm and had to trade it to the Tatars for a night's shelter. In return they gave her a whole sheep's head boiled in oil, hairy ears and all. But most of the time there was not much food to be had. When I was out on the steppe herding pigs, I would come home late in the evening or in the middle of the night from the fields and eat at her place. Once on a dark summer night when I came home (home is wherever mother is!), she directed me with a laugh in her voice to the food she was keeping warm in the Russian oven. I ate strangely grainy fresh meat fried with onions. Later she told me that that day they had been castrating young bulls in the area. The Germans had taken some of what had been cut off, and so had she. That was what our home in Siberia was like. When Mother described my personality, she would always say, "Quick to cry, quick to laugh, even quicker to get angry." I liked that. I like it to this day, and such people I count among my friends.

We were allowed to go back to our homeland in 1958. By the 1st of May we were in Tallinn. While still in Siberia we felt very happy to be free, but by the time we got to Pskov, we began to understand that in this part of the world people live differently. I felt stupid and backward, compared to the rest of the world. It was in Pskov that people with gloomy faces began boarding the train. No one shouted "Hello, friend, how's it going?" As we had heard in Russian all those years in Siberia.

In Saaremaa, at my sister's home, I wept for two weeks straight, gazing out the window and singing sad songs. But apparently I had a pretty easy time getting used to things: one person who had been taken as a five-year-old went back to Barabinsk after graduating from high school here.

The next turning point came when I was able to resume my studies. My father and brother sent packages from abroad, and we had enough money to get us through until February of the second year. A childless couple provided us with a roof over our heads and, what was most important—the teachers in the Leisi high school were sympathetic, and I was allowed to try out eighth grade. Humanities subjects were easy, but they told me that in geography class I would always say "Kitai" instead of "Hiina." Chemistry was an interesting story. I had no idea that chemical elements existed. The first time I leafed through

the chemistry textbook it seemed ridiculously easy: no text to speak of; what there was I could memorize, and some kind of large, capital letters, who knows what those were for; some had little numbers next to them. H_2O . I would say it just like that: “H, two and O.” Of course I got lower grades in such subjects. In the spring there was a new blow. The seventh grade report card was proof of graduation, and it was required to continue on to high school. I had to take my seventh grade examinations with fourteen-year-olds! I cried, I was very sad that I had to go to school with babies. Now it seems like fate’s greatest gift; the beginning of a worthwhile life, the life of an educated person. I made one mistake, a declension in the Estonian language essay. I should have written “Kaks kaptenit” (in the partitive); I had written the nominative instead, “Kaks kaptenid.” In one winter, I made my way through the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. My dream was to study agriculture. I had been bewitched by the broad wheat fields of Russia.

I had a difficult time at Olustvere, devilishly difficult. I did not complete technical school, because I could not find my way through mathematics. Old Professor Peet said, in a hopeless, whining voice, “Valdrand, you don’t know the theorem anyway!” Everyone in the technical school knew him as a cantankerous teacher. But life among young people was interesting. In 1992 I wrote a story about it, entitled “Poollelijäänud vagu.” (The Half-Finished Furrow). *Youth* magazine awarded it eighth place in its 1993 short story competition. In the story I described the love of my youth and the widespread drinking in Kohtla-Järve, an inseparable part of Soviet life.

In autumn 1961 I found a temporary field brigadier job for myself at the Riisipere *sovhoz*. I was twenty-five years old, and finally an independent person on Estonian soil. But I had Siberian attitudes and no apartment. The whole time I was there I boarded with the Lepenins near Munalaskme manor.

It was a full and eventful life for me in Munalaskme. I lived there from September 1961 to March 1962. In the Soviet era life for all Estonian women was so stressful that only in one’s retirement years can one look back on everything and analyze it quietly. I have done that, too, taken apart my life, a day at a time. The old Estonian proverb says that everyone is the blacksmith of her own happiness. But if you have spent most of your life on a different planet, when you don’t know the word “urine” and think it means something much thicker, and people

smile over you at the polyclinic, then understandably, you skip over many things that a local person would do without thinking. At that time my work as a brigadier in Munalaskme seemed difficult to me; I was always afraid of being fired, since I had been taken on temporarily. Now, when I hear from other people what they thought about me then, it strikes me as funny. For example, it seemed natural for me to follow the custom of young girls in Siberia—to sing in a loud voice wherever I went. My singing sounded wonderful in the empty grand hall of the old manor house at Munalaskme. When I had divided up the tasks for the workers, I would carol for hours in that hall. The boys walked by and listened intently. And a certain bearded, portly medic, who worked in another room, started coming in and promised to teach me how to skate. My landlady warned me about him. A twenty-five year old girl ought to be thinking about getting married! But my freedom went to my head. I wanted to continue my education. Next to the Munalaskme manor there was a tractor repair station. There were quite a few boys there; the girls from that area had gone to town (to Tallinn) to do finer work. Young married couples in the houses around there took the task of marrying off a fine young tractor driver very seriously. Today I have good, tender memories of that boy, Aadi. He did a good deal of stupid things to get my attention. Aadi had an apartment, a beige Volga and blond, curly hair. He did not drink too much. When we started on our way to the theatre, the girls suggested that I get in his car. I understood it to mean that I was an outsider, and that they didn't want me in their crowd, all of whom were traveling on the bus. Everything got messed up and Ilmar, an incredibly interesting guy was on the bus. In that village we played *Libahunt* (Werewolf) a few times. I was Tammaru Mari to Ilmar's Margus.¹¹ But at work "their own person" was found, a party member with papers, and Aili Valdrand had to look for a new job. I had already hauled a wagonload of clay to coat the walls of the manor house where my new apartment was—that was the way they did things in Siberia.

¹¹ The reference is to A. Kitzberg's (1855–1912) play, *Werewolf* (*Libahunt*, 1912), where Tiina, the orphaned daughter of a witch is taken into a farm family as a foster child. She grows up with the son of the family, Margus, and the other foster child, an orphan named Mari. Margus falls in love with temperamental Tiina, and the tragic plot centers around jealous Mari's accusation that Tiina, too, is a witch.

In the Martna *sovhoz* I was also field brigadier for two years. The *sovhoz* was made up of widely separated farms around a village in the middle of nowhere that I had never heard of before. Many of the young people from the area had gone to work in Tallinn; when they came home for the holidays, they would ask me condescendingly, "How's it going boosting agriculture together with Nikita?"¹²

In that *sovhoz*, Marju Lauristin, a university student at the time, paid me a visit in my cold room.¹³ They came to find out what a young komsomol-age "specialist" thought about herself and her life. Lauristin and her classmate, a young fellow, probably got a coatful of fleas from my landlady's granite floor. That house had no electricity, and there was nothing but a broom to keep the kitchen floor clean. They responded to my complaints by saying, "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps, then God will help you, too."

In the fall of 1963 I got a job stocking the shelves in the Lihula pharmacy for 370 rubles a month. I started studying in the ninth grade in the evening division of the high school. Among my responsibilities was weighing powdered medicines, a job classified as requiring the qualifications of a "specialist with secondary education." No living quarters were provided. From 1963 to the summer of 1967, I lived in six different villages in the Lihula area. I was evicted from one room in the industrial plant by the militia, my possessions dumped out in the rain because I wasn't officially registered there. They didn't do that to the pharmacist. After that I worked as a knitting machine operator at the factory. I was registered to live in the village, but my classes in evening school ended at 11:30 PM, and I didn't have the energy to walk the three kilometers distance in the wintertime, so I roomed with an old woman who moved her own bed to the top of the tile oven. She was a mental case, and I only lasted there a week. I had no home. My mother lived with her other daughter in Saaremaa. My sister had no comprehension of my life, we were like the two sisters in the Tammaru family, Tiina and Mari.¹⁴ Even though I played the part of Mari, in my heart I was Tiina. My sister started to treat my cousins (my aunt's daughters) as her own. They only came alive when they

¹² Nikita Khrushchev's agricultural initiatives.

¹³ Marju Lauristin, the daughter of Estonian communists Olga and Johannes Lauristin, was a key player in Estonian politics in the perestroika years.

¹⁴ Again, a reference to the female characters in A. Kitzberg's play, *Werewolf*.

had stuck their noses in a glass of vodka, having acquired that elegant habit of contemporary young women at university, of all places. Am I defending myself? Of course I am, I have no problems expressing myself. My aunt and her daughters were just like the others in their clan: quiet and secretive.

In my Lihula period I tried to make one day count for several, in order to make up for the time I had lost in Siberia. At six in the morning the machine-knitters' shift began, during the day from two to six in the afternoon I had a little time for meal preparation, studying and doing my homework, and then there was school from seven to eleven in the evening. I sang in a women's choir, and took part in the 1965 song festival.¹⁵ I wanted to be a little worthier than my extended family, who, thanks to the wide-open doors of the university at that time, were all killing time getting higher education. Even today I am firmly of the opinion that not everyone needs to walk through the doors of university.

On St. John's Eve, 1966, I got my diploma from the Evening Division of the Lihula High School. People said that I looked beautiful on the graduation photographs. Maybe that came from being happy.

My health started to go downhill. My blood pressure was already high, and they didn't prescribe blood pressure medication regularly, so sometimes I would be dizzy and fall. Working outside in the fresh air was better than working indoors.

In 1967 I left school again and came back to Saaremaa. I was able to register my residence in Kuressaare, since one of my mother's sisters gave me an attic room; I did not ask the factory, where I was a knitting worker, for living quarters. At that age old maids go either into the church or the tavern; I spent my time at the people's theatre. From 1970 on they were building a brewery in Kuressaare. I went and took the brewing courses being offered in Tartu, and we started to set up the plant in the spring. We cleaned the small machine parts with gasoline.

In the summer a fellow named Toomas came to work there. A handsome, plump-cheeked man, I guessed his age to be about 40. Later I found out he was 29 at the time. One day, in an empty room I sang again in a loud voice in Russian about the broad land, and he asked me from up on the scaffolding, "Where did you learn to speak Russian so well?" It turned out that we had lived 150 kilometers away from each

¹⁵ Song festivals, see Glossary.

other in Siberia. He had graduated from the Russian high school in Kohtla-Järve, and then attended the electrotechnical school.

I came down with pneumonia. In the sanatorium at Sõmera they did a tuberculosis test, and put me in the one-year-risk category. I thought to myself that if up until now I had had no one close to me (except for my mother), now people were certainly going to keep their distance from me. Toomas was the only one who spoke to me just as he had before. They didn't hire me at the brewery, and I was offended. Now I think it was the finger of God, because the leading workers there drank themselves into the gutter within two years. In November of 1970 I started working at the day-care center, and that became my job for the next 21 years.

Toomas visited me in my little room under the eaves; the staircase was as steep as the sky; he brought water up to me there. In March he found out that I was to be the mother of his child. He moved in with me, adding his little heap of clutter to mine. I believed we would become a family. He was soft and plump in every way. But that spring he and his mother were already plotting how a handsome boy like him would find himself a rich wife from Tallinn. On 10 May 1971, he announced that he was leaving. Our son was kicking in my womb; maybe he wanted to hang on to his father. "Try and hang onto the wind in the fields!" (Russian proverb) After a little refurbishing in the hospital I stayed behind in my room under the roof, alone and pregnant. The character Minna in Veera Saar's novel "Ukuaru" helped me hold my head up. (Right now I am reading Uustulnd's latest book about the way they made *kolkhozes* on the island of Abruksa. Well, I guess one should add a little humor when telling one's own story! The *kolkhoz* foremen were just as he describes, in those days when I was a brigadier. In Riisipere the director was very similar to Bernhard Kukku on Abruksa.)

I gave birth prematurely to a son in August of 1971. He was so tiny and blue when he came into the world! But he had a strong spirit; he mastered sucking a month earlier than the others—after all, he was born that much earlier, after all!) They kept him in kind of heated cradle with legs like a sewing machine. I was so poor that I had little milk in my breasts; I collected it from other mothers. After three days my son started to take a bottle, and they even told me that he would live. The boy's name is Karl. Today he is over 2 meters tall and weighs over 100 kilos. But my "mother-in-law" advised me not to show the

boy to his father, as he was not much bigger than an anchovy. We lived in that room under the roof, with its sky-staircase, with only a stove to warm us, just like our room in Siberia. The baby was often sick. My mother helped me take care of him. After a year had passed, his father legally claimed him as his son and paid alimony. I myself earned only 60 rubles a month. I have never seen a mother running with a baby buggy, but I had to do it several times. I lived at the other end of town and worked in the Aste day care center. By the time I got the child into the buggy, I only had fifteen minutes until the bus. I had to gallop, but I made it to the bus.

I lived in that room for ten years. Then the Union of Educational Workers literally ordered me to accept their offer of an apartment in the center of town. It was a one-room apartment on Komandant Street with a communal kitchen. As soon as I had moved in I found out that my neighbor was under treatment for syphilis. I called the polyclinic right away to ask what to do: with a neighbor like that, and I was working in a day-care center. Things worked out; they told me contagion wasn't a danger. But when he drank, he started right into singing, and he could keep yelling for 24 hours straight. I started having difficulties sleeping: all that noise in the day-care center, and then the noise on the other side of the wall at home. My hair started turning gray. Now nobody would guess that Aili had once had a head of black hair. I could have earned 60 rubles a month at the library too, more refined work, but as the "food lady" in the day-care center in a large group of children I could get 5 buckets of prepared food a day. Today that rascal of a boy works in the Rakvere Theatre, the one who tattled at home that the "food lady" always puts food into her own bottles first before giving it to the children. Well, I had a child, too. At that time there was a lot of food left over from the day-care children. I was not about to throw the big birthday cakes away that the clerical personnel working for high wages at "Saare Fisherman" brought for their little ones. My son was raised on scraps from other people's tables. He was a good boy; in elementary school he played memory games and wrote for *Sparks* magazine. But all of my energy went into raising him. Puberty is a difficult time for the teenager and his or her family. I had no one to lean on. When my son left with the fishermen on summer mornings to go to Abruka and hadn't returned by eleven at night, I had to cope alone with my fears. That was how my heart started "flapping"; it felt like a heart was all I had room for in my body; it was too tight

for anything else. As my son grew, Abba songs came into the house, along with a motor scooter and fishing gear. My mother grew gradually grayer, and couldn't run around anymore for joint pain, but life never stopped. Karl was in high school already. In the upper grades of elementary school he had learned photography so well that he bought a new camera with the money he made taking pictures. There was a video camera in school. He and a friend learned how to use it and they were sent to film school events. They carried the camera in an old shoulder bag. Karl had given his signature that if anything happened to the expensive instrument, we would have to pay. Where would we have gotten that kind of money! Before I got the fifteen thousand of compensation for the repressed I had never held a thousand ruble note in my hand. I never had more than that at one time. That money was devalued and turned into worthless "alder leaves."

In 1989 my son went to Tallinn and entered the Technical School for Economics. They educated business lawyers there. His father found him lodgings, and later Karl bought the apartment from him with his own earnings. The boy was growing, and there was little food in the city; he was so thin that when he graduated he wore dark glasses so that his sunken eyes wouldn't show. It was a turbulent time; I sat at the radio listening to what was happening in the capital city. I kept telling my child not to wander around in the streets. He didn't wander, either; during school he earned some extra money showing films in movie theatres. After his classes he would go from Nõmme to Lasnamäe to show films.

I retired; before the new law my pension was so small that it didn't clear the minimum standard of living; in the beginning the city paid 30 rubles, later, when the currency was devalued, an extra 300 rubles.

Times changed; I felt a wonderful sense of relief, since I did not have to rush to work anymore. Here in the courtyard of the Kuressaare Fortress all the deported gathered on 25 March. We already dared to get together, but there was much confusion. People started to write down what they remembered. My child's father and I had been very far away. He wrote his memoir for *Meie Maa*, then I tried, too, and they printed it. My story was so long that they published it in serial installments. One time a stranger said that he bought the newspaper just in order to read my story. My health improved. My soul was uplifted and my body got the rest it needed. Relatives came from abroad. To this day my brother does not have the right idea about what it was like in

Siberia. By now it is clearer than clear that the people from over there cannot understand us [Siberian exiles]. I heard that when Estonians from abroad were told about the deportations they asked, "Why did you go? You should have called the police if you were being harassed."

I am still living in a house that was returned to its former owner. There is a communal kitchen on the second floor, and a girl from the Social Welfare Department comes to help me out twice a week. The owner would probably give the building back to the municipal authorities, but who knows whether they would take it. Our own home was torn down by the Vesse *kolkhoz*, and what was left was divided, for free, among the people. My life is still quite unstable; I do not have the money to buy an apartment, and there is no other way to get one. I work a bit in the garden, growing flowers. Just as a hobby. My heart is attached to the soil. There is a communal garden for everyone living in the building. I should not admit to anyone that they sent me a flower from Siberia, a fragrant iris; that kind of exotic flower would disappear from my garden immediately. I do not own a television—it is against my principles.

My mother lived to the ripe old age of 89 and a half. How much she was able to do in her advanced age! She was 79 when she started to take care of my son. All I had was work, work, work. Three months before her death she came to town from Leisi to visit us, and her last words to Karl were, "Be a good boy, don't do anything naughty!"

My story, too, is coming into its home stretch.

Last fall the city government sponsored a memoir-writing competition about the changes in the years 1988-92. I wrote what I had seen during those years in the city of Kuressaare. The monument to V. Kingissepp was out on the square for a short time; then another one came to take its place. The Russians started to give their dead religious funerals in the Russian Orthodox church. At his official reception on 24 February the mayor gave me my second prize—2,000 kroons. That day Aili Valdrand went to her first fashionable party. The dishes on the *smörgåsbord* went untasted; I was afraid that as I walked across the parquet floor with my plate my cane would slip and there would be the old lady, flat on the floor. But life has never quite been successful at flattening me.

My son finished his first year at the Legal Studies Institute as a distance-student. The 20,000 kroons tuition for the second year is paid, too, he claims. As for the future, he will have to earn some money;

I have nothing left from the Russian era to give him any start-up capital. He has an apartment, too, as well as what they call a “woman friend.” But I hope I can stay around long enough to see a grandchild.

After the Baltic Chain¹⁶ they threw out the Russian-language books at the day-care center. I gathered some up for my future grandchild. Pushkin will never go out of style entirely! I hope a certain grandmother will one day read out loud to a little Valdrand: “Once there was an old man with his old wife, by a certain blue sea.” My life will continue on in him, as it does even now in my worn-out body.

¹⁶ See Glossary.



Valdur Raudvassar

BORN 1939

My family name comes from a distant forefather, the blacksmith of the Vastseliina church manor, who crafted the rooster that is still perched on top of the Vastseliina church tower to this day. That was the era when people were given family names, and the story goes that the pastor at the time, Carl Masing (1814–1859) suggested he choose a family name to correspond with his trade. After all, what matters most in blacksmithing is iron (*raud*) and a hammer (*vasar*). Several generations con-

tinued in the blacksmithing trade. The family moved to Noodasküla at the edge of the township, which later belonged to Lasva township. Even my grandfather kept to the blacksmith's trade. There have not been any wealthy farmers in the family. The Hinda farm was divided in three, and a third of the original farm is currently in my hands.

I was born at Hinda farm in Noodasküla on 30 July 1939, a citizen of the Republic of Estonia. With this fact comes the ethical responsibility to act in a manner worthy of an Estonian citizen, regardless of which government is in power or which flag is flying at any given moment. My father was a small farmer, with a farm of sixteen hectares. My mother came from Rõuge parish; as the oldest daughter of a family of many children, she had to earn extra money outside the home from a young age. She learned to weave, and worked as a weaver at a Petseri firm, even for some time after she was married, and narrowly missed perishing in the great fire in Petseri on 24 May 1939.

My childhood and the local surroundings are among the most important factors that shaped my personality and my destiny. I lived off the beaten track, not easily reached by innovations and subsidies, nor

by the pathologies of the times. My home was built in 1929, and the thatched storage shed rested on four stones. The old threshing barn still had the smell of the last century, though it had not been used for threshing for a long time. We did all of the farm work ourselves. A herdsman was hired from outside the family, usually from Setumaa, where it was common for people to hire themselves out as seasonal herdsman. At fourteen I plowed the vegetable patch by myself with a two-horse plow, but that was after the *kolkhozes* came,¹ and all the rest of the land had been taken away. I have no memories of the first period of Estonian independence, nor of its collapse. My personal memories begin with the German occupation. In rural locations off the beaten path this was a very peaceful, relatively happy time. From time to time the Germans would ride by along the road on their motorcycles and stop to ask for milk. They always paid in cash, or offered something else in exchange. The police wore republic-era uniforms, and the township government was in the hands of the same people as during the Estonian time. The first time I came to town I saw the swastika flying above the German military headquarters. The town hall was marked by the blue-black-and-white flag. I think of this as a happy occupation. Of course there was no democracy to speak of, but where do you find democracy anyway, when there is a war going on? At home the situation was regarded as unavoidable, and nothing bad was said about the Germans until the summer of 1944: "The Germans are retreating, and our boys are being left alone to defend us. The Germans want to turn us over to the Russians, even though they promised they would never let the Russians come in again, as long as we helped them out." As a child I thought Hitler was the ruler of a foreign state, but that our men were fighting alongside them against a common enemy. I was already quite a big boy when I found out that a fair number of Estonians from northern Estonia had fought in the Red Army. To my knowledge there was not a single man from our area who fought in the Russian army. Ours was quite a poor village, and thus the 1941 deportations² did not touch us, though there were some arrests. Several of our relatives disappeared without a trace. But when the front passed over us, it left a deep mark on my soul. In midsummer 1944 the Russians broke through the Petseri front. The Germans

¹ See Glossary under collectivization of Estonian agriculture.

² See Glossary.

ordered us to empty the village. They predicted that the front would stop at the Kütioru line. We went to our relatives' on the other side of Võru. A few days later, when the Russians approached Võru, we went further, this time to my aunt's husband's farm in Tartumaa. Each time we moved on, we left something behind, like a lizard leaving behind pieces of its tail: first the sheep, then the cows, and finally we had only a horse and a load-ed-down wagon. On top of the load sat my mother, holding my little sister who had been born that spring. And so we wandered, and I was able to see my homeland in the midst of struggle. I am a fortunate person to have been able to see Estonia fighting, self-confident and proud. The people were united in those days, and one could see rich Mulgimaa farmers offering food and shelter to war refugees and Estonian soldiers.

We made a longer stop at Lääne farm in the township of Kolga-Jaani. It was August, and the weather was nice. I ate cherries off the tree. In the yard there were sixteen to seventeen year-old girls sitting on an empty wagon, and suddenly a spontaneous song broke out: "Come back O sons of Estonia, come back, we are waiting for you, bring back your wounded friends, bring the dead and the fallen, bring them all." I have forgotten the face of that first "bride," but time will never erase the memory of that song.

This was the people's struggle: somehow they understood what was coming. In 1944 the Estonian people were healthy, and united, and that was how the older people said it had been in the summer and fall of 1919, at the end of the War of Independence, again in 1941, when the Russians were being chased out and now once more, in 1944. It seemed as if all of Estonia was on wheels: the roads of the Sakala hills were clogged with droves of refugees as far as the eye could see. The end of the war brought us back home. We had planned to go to Sweden, but when the boat was waiting we began to have doubts: what business did we have going to Sweden? But when the boat had gone, we started thinking about going to Sweden again. We were in Tori township, and on the other side of the woods I saw the Tori church in flames. Father and I crept ahead to see what was happening. People were running over the burning bridge. One young man pulled up on a bicycle, threw it into the bushes, pulled his coat over his head and ran through the fire. Others waded through the river. Father and I turned back to join our caravan. Something strange had happened. It had been a lovely summer day, even considering that it was the end of September, but now the sun no longer showed itself, and a light rain began

to fall. Just then a man in gray with an expressionless face came by, and for the first time in my life I saw a five-pointed star on a soldier's cap.

Some time later another group of Russians arrived, and the man grew bold, pulled a long knife from the belt of one of the soldiers, and laid it across my father's neck. Then he started laughing and took it away, showing both his power and his mercifulness. The Russians said, "Go on home, no one will do anything to harm you, you can live in your own homes, and there will be no *kolkhozes*." We made our way back through northern Tartumaa, and saw signs of the battles of September 1944: not a single farmhouse had been left unharmed. All of them had either been burned or riddled with bullets. We spent the nights under the open sky or in the ruins. For the first time I saw Tartu, with its smoking ruins. Russian women, with trophy bayonets on their belts were regulating traffic on the temporary bridge. There they arrested Father for the first time. When we were back in Võrumaa, he caught up with us. He was arrested a second time at the Kirumpää bridge. Father's documents aroused suspicion—a youngish man, perhaps he was an official in disguise? We were already back home when Father caught up with us. Our home was still standing, though there were holes in the barn roof and walls from bomb and shell fragments. My aunt's husband's family was living there, after fleeing the city to get out of the path of the war.

The third time Father was arrested was before the snow fell, and this time he was gone for twelve years. He did not come back until 1956. He was never really accused of anything. He had just come back from the woods, where he had been chopping wood to meet the firewood quotas the state had imposed. We were on our way to bed when the dogs started barking. Two Russian soldiers stepped in carrying rifles, and along with them a Russian Estonian,³ a village communist named Piirisild. Father was taken under armed guard to the town hall; supposedly the firewood quotas had not been met. He did not return. His first interrogation took place in Riga, where they asked him whether he had ever belonged to the Defense League, fought in the War of Independence, or been a village elder during the German occupation. Father answered yes to all these questions. Had he been in the Home Guard?⁴ No, he had not, answered Father. He had not been on the list

³ Russian Estonians, see Glossary.

⁴ Home Guard and Defense League, see Glossary.

for the home guard, but as a member of the Defense League, he automatically belonged. I remember how he would be on duty to guard the bridge at night, and went on raids a few times. From 1943 on, the Russians started to drop parachutists down on us, and the militia went on raids to round them up from the woods; the Germans were afraid of the woods.

The second time they interrogated Father was in Moscow. There they said to him: "If they sent you all this way, there must have been something to accuse you of." The sentence was ten years. When after Stalin's death they gave amnesty to many of those who had been sentenced to twenty-five years, they found my father to be anti-Soviet to the core, and sent him for resettlement for an unspecified period of time to the town of Dolgomost in Krasnojarski *krai*. Father did not think it was right for a person to hide his beliefs, and told them straight what he thought of things. When he was in camp in Mordva, we sent him letters at the address: st. Potma c/o Javas, ZH 385. When I landed there myself some twenty years later, there was still one man left in the camp who remembered him.

I actually never noticed how I went from a village in the middle of nowhere into world politics. It was quite clear to me that as long as the Russian flag was flying in the mast, there was no point in trying to get anywhere. This was a foreign power, the goal of which was the destruction of the Estonian people. I had seen how they had taken over the country, and there was nothing more logical than to continue to resist, so that the Russians' hopes would not materialize. I could feel the people's disgust at the new regime, and all kinds of fairy tales were circulating. The day my father had been arrested, a man came from Võru, listened to my mother's story, and said "The main thing now is for you not to give yourself up to them; a new war is coming, and the Russians will be driven out." There were constant rumors of deportations; some nights we would sleep at the house of strangers, some nights in our storage shed. In all likelihood the first ones they would get rid of were family members of those already repressed.

That was how my spirit of resistance grew. In school we bumped up against the lies in textbooks and heard them from the mouths of our teachers. A spirit of camaraderie developed. Resistance organizations were formed in almost every elementary school, not to speak of high schools and vocational schools. The more restless ones founded them; it was a romantic thing to do. I attended the Tüütsmäe school for a few

years, until a large school was opened in Loosi in the fall of 1949. The cornerstone for it had been laid in 1939. Children from a few different townships attended there. One of my relatives, Heldur Raudvasar, joined the first organization. The main activities were collecting weapons, ammunition, and literature from the republic era. Weapons were being collected for Day X, when military operations would begin. We were to act the way the Forest Brothers did in 1941, and the Home Guard men. We pictured ourselves attacking the Russians as soon as the Americans came. In those days there were weapons lying around everywhere, left behind by the armies. Entire German ammunition stores were found; these were hauled off and hidden. A gun was a valuable thing regardless of the times. Each boy had at least two rifles. Those who had pistols were regarded as really tough guys.

The first organization did not have a name. There were ten or so boys. Their leader was Heldur, whose father had been killed, and whose other male relatives had either disappeared or fled the country. He lived with his mother, sister, and grandmother. He had only an elementary school education, but he was very well read. During the "Prague Spring" he even translated materials from the Czech. We were encouraged by the fact that not a week would go by when there were not shots or machinegun fire coming from the woods. In our area the woods were full of Forest Brethren. At the end of March 1953 there was a major battle between the Forest Brothers⁵ and the Red Army at Puutlipalu, which lasted a whole day.

We, too, thought we might give the director of our school a warning, and fired a few shots over his head. They thought the Forest Brothers did it. One mother found out from her son that he had taken part in the attack, since the boy talked about it proudly at home. The mother ran to the authorities, and announced that she would turn the whole organization in as long as they left her son unpunished. And so the KGB came to the school during the October holidays in 1951. The prosecutors recorded the incident as a conflict between teachers and pupils, and not as a political matter. No one was arrested. Heldur's mother rescued her son in a completely honest way: she sold her cow, and gave the money to the prosecutor. Heldur was not allowed to return to school. I had to repeat a grade as well, but I had no regrets: soon there was going to be another war, and official propaganda kept

⁵ Forest Brothers, see Glossary.

feeding those sentiments. The next day I met my new classmates, who regarded me as an old veteran. We created a new organization, the Three Lions Association, which had fifteen members. On the membership card there was the first name, family name, and code name (mine was Hawkins). The mothers figured out the membership cards; the fathers had either been arrested, killed or had fled the country. We were a generation raised mostly by our mothers. Finally we passed a rule that the membership cards had to be kept hidden. Just as with the weapons, the boys often could not find them. In 1955 we graduated from the Loosi School and dispersed, but the organization was not dissolved. We did not have a constitution. Our task was to collect literature that explained and supported national ideals, and that truthfully represented conditions in Estonia past and present. As for the contemporary situation, we were to compose reports ourselves based on foreign radio broadcasts. These reports were circulated among ourselves. From time to time we would practice using weapons, and keep up our demining skills by defusing shells and mines. It was a wonder that our intestines were not left hanging from some tree. Another aspect of our task was arousing opposition, encouraging others not to embrace a foreign faith and mentality. Often we would do crazy things; when we went to town we would look around to see if there was anyone in uniform, and would start singing. People liked this; they would clap us on the shoulder and say we were fine boys. We would sing, "Be free, Estonian Sea" and other songs from the war era.

I must say it is to the credit of my local folks that I had staunch support, not only during my childhood, but also as a grown man. When I came back from prison camp in 1967, I noticed that nothing had changed in Lasva or Loosi. All family celebrations, including ordinary birthdays and confirmation parties would begin with the singing of the Estonian national anthem. Everyone stood up when they were singing, not the way they do it now, sitting down and tapping out the beat with their feet. Those who had joined the communist party were regarded as turncoats. People lived the way the Jews did, in hopes that their state would be restored tomorrow. This attitude remained strong in my area to the very end. It was an oasis in a red hell.

The young people did not want to stick it out in *kolkhozes*. In 1955 I went to Tallinn for the first time. I wanted to go to the marine academy, and to see the world, including the free world, though I have never had the slightest thought of fleeing and going into exile. I was not

accepted into the marine academy, since the head teacher who provided my character reference wrote down that I had been involved in an organization and had shot at the school director. At a friend's invitation I enrolled in the Võru technical school, where I went for half a year. By then any interest I might have had in studies had evaporated. I am not technically inclined, and besides, studying interfered with my people's struggle for survival. I quit and went to work in Võru. The next year I enrolled in night school, but conflicts came up there, too. I graduated from high school much later, in the Mordva prison camp.

We did not have direct contact with the other underground organizations, but we knew that they existed. We also knew that schoolboys from Võru had been arrested. We started up again. Of the Loosi boys, many were in technical school or high school: Eino Hallop, Tõnu Meldre, an Ingrian named Aleksander Kontsarov. The organization renewed itself. The younger ones who had found out about it approached me and said they wanted to join. We decided not to give them membership cards, because of past experience. Gradually it began to dawn on us that the third World War was not going to happen, and what would decide the future of our people was something else altogether: an even more brutal struggle, an ideological and cultural war for people's souls. That was what would decide whether or not the Estonian people would survive.

We kept ourselves and our weapons in a state of readiness. Meetings were often held in Kütioru, a naturally sheltered place, where we practiced shooting, exploded shells, took long hikes. We would put a shell in the fire, and dig ourselves into the ground to get a sense of what it felt like when the ground shook. We celebrated national holidays. Often we would meet at the home of dental technician Lainelo. Among the new members were my cousin Helemets' classmates, but there were others as well. We were not caught until 1961. Meanwhile, I had gone to work in a factory that manufactured gas analysis equipment for the Russian army. My cousin and I had to go to Leningrad for training. In Leningrad we met people from the free world for the first time in our lives. I had learned some Finnish from my father, who had been in Finland during World War I, and I struck up conversation with some Finns in a tourist group. They were interested in what life was like in Estonia, whether there were any Estonians left, and were genuinely amazed that they had run into some. To their question, whether there were any more Estonians left in prison, I answered, no.

Not even a year would go by before I was in a camp where there were 120 Estonians.

I gave one group of Finns a copy of the newspaper *Proletarian Life*, where there were pictures of the Mõtuste Forest Brethren, in order that people could report on their location. At the end of the conversation, they shook my hand and said, "Things might go badly for you." Finnish tourists were watched and followed to see who would approach them. I was indeed arrested, searched, and anything that looked suspicious was confiscated: my notebook, ballpoint pens, a few pieces of chewing gum. They threatened prosecution next time around. My first meeting with Finnish tourists was a coincidence, but later we sought them out ourselves. We knew where they were usually put up and recognized their buses. I heard about Väinö Linna's novel *The Unknown Soldier*. I wanted to explain to them what was happening in Estonia, and to tell them the truth. I also sent letters and messages to my godfather in Sweden. At the end of the summer I returned to Võru and went back to work in the factory. The organization gathered strength, for we had pumped it full of the "west wind." Apparently, however, the transcript of my first arrest had not been left to lie in a drawer in Leningrad.

1961 was a critical year: the Berlin wall was built; the leader of the Ukrainian nationalists, Bandera, was killed, and the Caribbean crisis was looming. At a party in Pikakannu I saw Väino Sõna for the first time; up until then I had only heard of him. He was serving in the Navy in Tallinn, and had pulled down the red flag on his ship and gotten four years for it. This time he was quite drunk, and said it was time to get operations going to prove that the Estonian people were still alive. KGB agents had just murdered Aksel Luitsalu, a leader of the Estonians in Canada, and the former police prefect of Pärnumaa. The diaspora had just proposed to the Canadian Prime Minister that he raise the question of the illegal occupation of Estonia and the other Baltic States in the United Nations. That was to happen in a month. We decided that on that day we would raise flags in the church tower or on the roof of a higher building, and blow up a bridge or two, so that the message would reach those abroad that the Estonians at home did not support the occupation.

A few weeks went by, and the leader of the organization, Heino Lainelo, came to visit me in the country to report that they were in desperate need of literature. There was an organization in Tartu, and a

man named Tõnisson had approached him to make contact. The next day Tõnisson and I met. He was a fine blond boy. Some time later Enn Tarto⁶ said that they had a serious motor sports fanatic named Tõnisson in their organization who had relatives in Võru. Tarto had found out that there was some kind of organization in Võru as well, and sent Tõnisson to Võru with the assignment of finding it and making contact. That was how Tõnisson and I came to meet. What happened to him after that was very dramatic. His motorcycle failed while he was riding one day, and his head hit a rock. After many weeks in a coma, he died. He would have brought us into contact with Enn Tarto and Taivo Uibo's organization, the camp branch of which was active in Mordva under the leadership of Jaan Isotamm.

Heino Lainelo paid me another visit, and asked me whether I wanted to send anything with him to my Tallinn acquaintances. I said there was nothing to send, since we had arranged everything by word of mouth. I asked him to pass on the message, "Let everything be as we agreed." Heino promised to come back in three days, but a week went by and he had not returned. He finally came when I was on the night shift at work one day: "I am back, and there is a letter for you."—"Give it to me."—"I don't have it with me, I'll give it to you tomorrow. I was afraid the guards would notice me and take the letter from my pocket. It is a great letter. Meet me tomorrow morning at eight in the park on the banks of the Tamula Lake." I went to the park on the foggy morning of 19 October, 1961. Heino was sitting there waiting, and handed me a thick envelope, and my notebook. "How did that end up in your hands?"—"I took it that time, thinking there might be something interesting in it." I said that was not a nice thing to do.

I opened the letter. I was dumbfounded: it was written by a drunken person, full of boasting...let's blow some things up, we need to start an organization. Even though Viktor Niitsoo discusses it in his book, there never was such an organization, except for the fact that it was listed in the KGB files as some kind of "National Liberation Front" or "National Liberation Army." The letter had been written by Väino Sõna, whom Heino Lainelo had gone to visit in his military unit.

⁶ Enn Tarto, (b. 1938), Estonian dissident, first active in the Estonian Youth Brigade (*Eesti Noorte Malev*), and co-signatory of the Baltic Appeal, imprisoned for anti-Soviet political activity from 1956–1960, 1962–1967, and 1983–1988. After his release, Tarto played an active role in the movement for national independence.

They had been given city permits; Lainelo had bought several bottles of vodka, and had a few younger Võru boys along. After they drank the liquor, they had caroused for a while and then written this letter. I thought it was all nonsense. But I did not want to destroy the letter right away. I wanted to talk the whole thing over with one of my older friends. We started walking, and I noticed two men in raincoats crossing the street, watching us, and then turning their heads away. I stopped. Heino said, "What did you just see?"—"I don't like those men's faces." Then he said something strange: "Do you think it is possible to forgive anything a person might do?" I was surprised: "Are you drunk today, too? Wasn't it enough that you were drunk in Tallinn?" Heino equivocated, "Well...I promised to give you some money, but I didn't get a chance."

As soon as Heino left, a man approached me and greeted me: he looked like a bum, dirty and sweaty, with a wrinkled tie around his neck. I thought maybe he harked back to the time I was working as the operator of a traveling cinema. He said there had been a brawl, that he had spent the night in the *miilits* station, that he had been called back for interrogation, and after that he would be given his passport back. We kept walking toward the *miilits* station, and the stranger rambled on. When we had crossed Liiva Street, I heard footsteps behind me, and before I could turn around and look, each man had one of my hands. The events lined up with lightning clarity: today's meeting in the park, the letter in the pocket, and the arrest by the men I had seen before. The bum had been keeping an eye on me until the other two had a chance to capture me. The two men were Tallinn KGB officers of the rank of major: one was named Ilves, and the other Leonid Barkov, who soon after that was promoted to general. The "little hobo" was a disguised KGB agent, but that the arrest was carried out by men of the rank of major meant that the matter was serious.

At first I had a little hope, (there's always hope!), that maybe they thought I was one of those involved in the brawl. At the police station I was directed toward the stairs. The KGB was on the second floor. I thought to myself, I have to gather my wits quickly and not panic. Many a man smarter than myself had walked this path; even Päts and Laidoner had fallen into their hands.⁷ In the upstairs room all the men were in civilian clothes; the only one in major's uniform was

⁷ Konstantin Päts, Johan Laidoner, see Glossary.

the bald man, Trempi. Imagine that, they had even sent three majors out to catch us! They asked, “Young man, do you know where you are?” I said I didn’t know. “Then it is my duty to announce to you that you are in the headquarters of the Võru department of the Security Committee working under the direction of the Council of Ministers of the Estonian SSR. Do you have anything to report to the State Security apparatus?”—“I do. I protest against being retained by force and dragged here.”—“We accept your protest. Do you have a weapon on you?”—“No.” I was searched and they took the envelope out of my pocket.—“But this is an anti-Soviet document.” I shrugged. Then the interrogation began: where did you get it, and who gave it to you? I answered that I had found it, and that that was all I knew. “But here is your name, and the signature of Väino Sõna. How do you explain this coincidence?”

Then I heard familiar voices. My cousin, Aadu Helemets, was dragged into the next room, followed by Rein Pettai and Aaro Mällo; they must have hit him. They searched my home. I spent two days and nights at the Võru KGB headquarters, and slept in the isolation cell. Three or four people had happened to witness my arrest. I hoped someone would recognize me and begin to spread stories. In fact there was one person, who recognized both me and Väino, and told Väino that Valdur had been captured. But Väino could not foresee the worst. He was being followed, since they wanted to see who he had contacts with. Soon he was arrested as well. By now it was clear that this was Heino’s work. He had fallen in the hands of the KGB earlier. I was taken to Tallinn and put into the Patarei prison.⁸ Väino Sõna’s cell was across from mine. This was in October 1961.

The trial was held in February 1962. What was really impressive was that it was a military court that pronounced our guilty verdict—the Tribunal of the Red Navy of the Baltic Sea, not the Supreme Court of the Estonian SSR. All of them were in uniform, like all the occupying forces, and everything took place through an interpreter, so it was not necessary to argue with the Estonian bootlickers about how ethical it was to serve the occupying forces. I was given six years, and Väino four. I said, “There was no organization, you have made it up.”

The trial took two days. On the first day, the other members of the organization were in court as witnesses. When the trial began, all the

⁸ Patarei prison, see Glossary.

participants were introduced, and the witnesses were dismissed. There were seven boys. When they were called in one by one to testify, I noticed that Heino Lainelo's head was bandaged. Six years later I found out what had happened. All of them had been put in a witnesses' room to wait. Our appearance had had a depressing impact on them: our heads shaved, our emaciated faces. One of the boys, who had a strange name, had looked up and said to Lainelo: "All of this damned mess is your fault, you devil!" After that he had grabbed the water carafe and hit him over the head. In the end I was given permission to ask them: "Did we have an organization, or didn't we?" All of them except Heino Lainelo said there had never been any organization.

The witnesses held up pretty well and were on their good behaviour; one of the weaker ones cried, but nobody told them what they wanted to hear. Later I registered a protest against the accusation: "If only one of the witnesses mentioned an organization, what is the accusation based on? That's the main question concerning our guilt, and I demand that the witnesses be cross-examined again."—"We cannot do that, because we sent them back to Võru last night."

We were sentenced under three paragraphs: 68 (anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda), 70 (activities aimed toward particularly dangerous crimes against the state) and 207 (illegal harboring of weapons and ammunition.) At my home they had found four rifles and one Walter pistol, which Heino Lainelo had asked for ahead of time, under pretense that he wanted to practice shooting. Thus they had made thorough preparations for my arrest.

When I heard the verdict, I felt peaceful. Finally I knew something definite about the term of imprisonment. I was not beaten, though they had hit me once in Võru, but there was plenty of psychological pressure. During the interrogations they would shine a bright light right in your eyes. When it got very tense, two men would come, usually Barkov and Ilves. Trempi would pose a question, and the other two would shout the question into my ear as loudly as they could, one on each side. I looked straight at Trempi, and talked, knowing that before long he would look away. One time in Võru we were left sitting in the interrogation room, Major Barkov was napping on a chair, and the others had gone to conduct another search of my home. I was standing by the open window and thought about the possibility of jumping out and making my escape. I said I wanted to go to the WC. "Wait, there is no one to take you right now." I made a sour face. "Do you really need to

go? Did it turn your stomach?” He gave me permission to go, searched me one more time at the door, and felt something in the folds of my pocket: a little blue-black-and-white pin. He ripped it out along with a piece of cloth. I pulled the door shut suddenly, and his fist hit the door. I did not get hurt, but he did, and he was bleeding. I bolted the door. He knocked: “It is forbidden to lock the door from the inside.”—“But you’re not allowed to beat me, either!” Silence. Some time later he knocked again: “Aren’t you done yet?” This time he spoke more softly. I came out. He put a paper on the table. “Write a statement about your organization.” I wrote him an explanation of the history of the Estonian flag. After he had read it he said, “Now let’s agree that there was no pin and no beating.”

They did not send us off before St. John’s Day, because on that day they arrested Enn Tarto and Taivo Uiibo and their whole organization. During their interrogations the authorities became convinced that we were not connected among ourselves. We were all sent to Mordva. Usually the prison wagon is hooked onto some local train; a Stolypin wagon⁹ with prisoners usually does not get attached to a big express train. Every night the folks are taken out of the wagon and taken to spend the night in the local prison. Some prisoners are left behind at each stop. We were not told where they were taking us. The wagon was always crammed full to overflowing. It was hard to turn around, some would sit on the floor, others on the bench. The murderers hopped up on the bunk beds and ruled that roost. There were no windows in the prison wagon; guards with dogs moved back and forth in the corridor. At every station there was a big rush: some prisoners had to be taken off the train and another lot loaded on. In the beginning there were no other politicals besides myself. In fact even I did not have a “political” paragraph; in the Soviet era political prisoners were called “especially dangerous state criminals.”

I arrived in the prison camp on 11 July 1962. I found out right off that there were about 120 Estonians in that camp. Those who were not busy with their work came to greet the new prisoners and see whether there were any countrymen among them. I got a glimpse of Enn Uiibo the very first day. I had heard that there was a poet in that camp, and I remembered reading a few of his poems in “Olion” and “Tänapäev.” He was sitting in the summer theatre where they showed

⁹ Stolypin wagon, or the “Black Crow.”

us films sometimes in the summertime. He had already been classified as an invalid, and did not have to do forced labor. He read and wrote the whole time. Enn Uiibo wore a blue prison uniform which was very clean, and even had a white collar, with a sunshade made out of a handkerchief on his head. Large serious eyes. He had spent half his life in prison camp, living the life he would have lived anywhere he found himself: reading, writing, thinking. He interacted with very few people, mostly the young, or with old friends. Among the young he looked for good soil in which to sow his idealism. If he decided that someone was the right kind of person, they could visit him, even in the middle of the night. He was always ready to offer encouragement; people would confess their doubts and disappointments to him and always find support. He wanted us to read more: "What are you chattering about, like birds all day long? Read, write, burn it all later, but that way you learn to express yourself and focus your thoughts. If you don't write, even reading won't do you any good." Enn also wanted us to write poetry. And so I wrote poetry in the solitary cell of the prison: there you were only given narrow strips of paper on which there was no room to write prose; only a verse would fit. About my writing he said, "Pretty good for a young person of today, but you are never going to be a poet. And you are not meant to be a poet, either, you are meant to become a soldier. There are enough poets in Estonia, but very few soldiers. You need to leave here as a soldier and continue the fight. A soldier gets help from God."

There were also opportunities to send messages to the other side of the barbed wire fence, sending poems and other writings out with letters. Enn Uiibo had refined this kind of "cultural warfare" to an extraordinary degree. He said that we should only collaborate with Latvians and Lithuanians, since if Estonia was going to regain its freedom, it would do so along with Lithuania and Latvia. We did not encourage the idea of improving things in Russia, like the later dissidents; our area of activity was national resistance. The only condition we imposed on the future was independence.

While I was in camp, the contrast between two kinds of hope intensified: the older generation was waiting for a third world war and the reunification of Germany, and was disappointed by American politics; we, on the other hand, realized that so much time had gone by that we had to find some form of a resistance movement, even if the Soviet regime lasted for an entire generation. Under no circumstances

would we allow ourselves to assimilate into Soviet society; we had to find an alternative. We were not going to allow ourselves to join the Komsomol, even for tactical considerations; that was already giving a drop of blood to the devil.

But if you want to hold onto yourself, you must not allow yourself to become isolated; you have to find people who think like you. All of the Estonian prisoners kept together, and then the young and the old among themselves. We celebrated all the holidays: St. John's Eve, Easter, Christmas, Victory Day, each other's birthdays, the 24th of February. We would check to see who had a birthday around that time, and claimed we were celebrating a birthday. We would sing the Estonian national anthem. They could not find any rule that prohibited singing in prison. The Lithuanians and Ukrainians would sing their long, sad songs every evening until they went to bed. Recreational activity was also permitted, to some extent. There were two orchestras in the camp: a brass band, where there were some Estonians and one Latvian, and a symphony orchestra composed entirely of Estonians, even though the percentage of Estonians in the camp was only ten percent.

There was also a system of informers. We were always asked what meeting we were holding, and who said what. Nobody got caught, except for Isotamm and the others in 1962. One time we narrowly missed being caught, too, but Erik Udam got out. There was a rule: the continuation of anti-Soviet activities in camp entailed a further sentence, and in some cases even the death penalty. Once they tried to apply that rule to us, but instead we figured out who the informer was: Lembit Kivimäe from Pilstvere.

We read a great deal in camp. There was a library, and inside the covers of Soviet-era books they had grafted in *Akadeemia* publications and books about Estonian history. Books could only be sent from home provided that they had a Soviet index number. Tucked inside letters we were also sending poems written in exile by Bernard Kangro and Marie Under.

I was released from prison in 1967. When we got out, we picked up on our former connections. We communicated intensively, but it was clear that no organizational documents of any kind should be drawn up. All the gatherings were masked as birthdays, midsummer, etc. And so we spread out to cover all the counties. A long time went by until I saw Heino Lainelo again. The others said that he had been lynched

and beaten. I had been free for two weeks when we met. He came up to me, greeted me, and said, "Let's talk." We went to the marketplace so we could see from a long way off that no one was creeping up on us, and sat down on the bench. He asked, "How did things go?" I replied: "I have only one question for you. Why and since when have you been employed by the KGB?" – "I never was." – "You said so yourself. When I demanded to face my accusers and went on a hunger strike in order that you would be brought from Võrumaa to Pagari Street in Tallinn. Major Trempi interrogated us; we were sitting there together, one against each wall. The whole time he was tapping our answers into his Russian typewriter, we whispered among ourselves. I asked, 'Who ratted on us?' You pointed to yourself. I asked, why? You said you would tell me one day, that it was a very long story." Years later we started communicating again. But to this day I do not know what happened to him. However, even for this communism is to blame.

After being released, two things were prohibited to a political prisoner: holding a position of leadership and traveling abroad. But even out of prison there were countless possibilities to avoid cooperating with the Soviet regime. One only had to renounce two of the cardinal sins: vanity and fear. As history has shown, these are the two ways that tyrants keep people enslaved. As a schoolteacher I said the same things then that I am saying now. When I came back from the camps, I was director of a farm in a *kolkhoz* for six months, and after that a construction worker. In 1968 I enrolled in Tartu University in Estonian philology, in the distance-learning division. I was thrown out in 1973; the reason given was that I had not passed an examination in contemporary Estonian language. I went to see Haamer: "There are people here who have many examinations left to pass..." Haamer went over to the window and looked out, indicating that the interview was over. Thanks to my years in university I was able to apply for a teaching position. I happened to meet the director of the old Loosi school (Karl Savi was a good man, not the kind we fired on in those earlier years), and he said "Come and work for us. Everybody knows you at the Loosi School." And so I was a teacher at the Loosi School for eight years, teaching German, Russian, geography, physics, and woodworking. I was forbidden to teach history and Estonian. But I could actually teach whatever I liked about Estonia. And not a single student informed on me! I talked about the contemporary political situation,

the occupation, Estonian history, everything. We went on an excursion to the Petseri convent. But I could feel the KGB was following me; the agent was the director, A. Tammet.

In 1971 I married Aino Kilbi, from Tartu. She was studying biology at the time, and is now a biology teacher. We have two children, Liina and Mika.

On Teacher's Day, 25 August 1978, Enn Saarik, the ideology secretary for the regional Party committee, announced: "All the teachers have done good work, except for two—the Loosi School teacher Raudvassar, and Koppel, director of the Obinitisa School. Neither one has behaved in a way befitting a Soviet schoolteacher. Both have submitted their resignations." This came as a surprise to me. I went directly to the Võru KGB and asked what I was being accused of. They asked my name, and said: "We should have talked to you a long time ago. I can give you the answer to your question in about an hour." I went out and saw the head of the KGB, Heldur Lenk pass by, and turn into the Võru Party committee headquarters. That meant that the regional Party committee was even more active than the KGB itself. Afterwards he said, "You have no great sins, only a great deal of little ones. Go and work somewhere else." I wanted to go to Obinitisa in Setumaa, but I was denied permission. So we moved to Antsla. I got a position in a school, but was not assigned any lessons. I was custodian for the stadium superintendent. Some time later the head of the Võru fire department came and invited me to be regional instructor for the Antsla area. What a golden life! My territory of operations was from the great oak tree in Urvaste to the Latvian border at Vastse-roosa, and from Osula to Kuldre. I was able to wander around. In every agricultural unit there had to be a firefighting squad. It was soon clear who was who, and they took down Lenin's portrait from the wall in Antsla as well. At the Antsla firefighters' squad we started celebrating all the national holidays, and there were talks and singing from morning till night. When the automobile drivers went on strike in Kuldre, they reported on it on *Voice of America*. My cousin and I even got to arguing about it: he said there were American spies all over the place. I said: "No, there aren't. I passed the information about the strike on to Mati Kiirend in Tallinn, and he passed it along." After the European cooperation treaty was passed the transmission of information from Estonia to abroad picked up. After that phone calls became possible, though everything was under the control of the KGB, of course. In the meantime

the Soviet regime had begun to totter. I was invited to be a teacher in the Antsla high school. I said: "I will give lessons, but I won't come for good." I taught economic geography, and also gave lessons in night school. From 1988 on I worked at the Võru museum as inspector for the protection of historic monuments. From 1995–1997 I was head of propaganda and youth work in the Defense League headquarters. At present I am a teacher of history and social studies at the Võru Adult High School.

There is no point in hiding the fact that in the current executive branch of the Estonian government, the army, and the police, there is not a single former member of the national resistance movement, even though there are many dissidents who are much older.

I am happy that life gave me the opportunity to participate in the movement of national resistance. I am grateful to my home, the place where I spent my youth, and to my companions in the struggle, who helped me stay on the path to the end.

Our movement was strong enough to carry on the idea of the Estonian republic, the achievement of our fathers, throughout an oppressive half-century. Although we were too weak to give the restored Estonian Republic its true face and historic mission, no one can ever accuse us of cowardice or vanity.



Ene Ergma

BORN 1944

What is a life history? Does it mean writing about how my own choices have shaped my success, or are there other things to take into consideration? It seems too early to be writing about my life, even though, according to the way Estonians understand it today, I have achieved the maximum that a normal scientist can achieve. I will try to look at myself from a neutral point of view, even though this is far from easy, since love and compassion for oneself always come first.

Childhood

I recall what Saint-Exupéry's Little Prince said: our childhood is where we come from. That is where it all begins. My generation did not feel the cold wind of the Great War on our own skins, though we must certainly have felt it indirectly. It is the year 1949, and I am sitting under the table with my playmate who lives downstairs, and whose father fell while fighting in the German army. Our parents are talking very quietly about something. I later found out that my friend's mother, who feared the impending deportation,¹ asked my mother to take her children in and raise them, should she be deported herself. We did not know anything about this, but even now I remember the feeling of fear that something bad was happening. I learned to read early (it must have been around age three). It was hard at first, since I read "with my voice," and I got tired quickly. In those days we often had no electricity

¹ See Glossary.

in the evening, and my mother did not think the light of a petroleum lamp was bright enough to read by. Thus I was not allowed to read as much as I would have wanted to. I could point to two “examples” from my preschool days that, with a certain amount of imagination, might be relevant to my later scientific work. Our neighbor’s house had electricity, but ours did not. When I asked my mother the reason for this unfairness, she replied that a “big nose” lived in the house next door, and so they have electricity in the evenings. Apparently I took this very seriously, and volunteered the next day to go and pick up the milk next door. Having performed a thorough analysis, I reported to my mother that our father’s nose was quite a bit larger than the uncle’s next door, and so we should be the ones getting the electricity.

At the end of the 1940s there were shortages of many things, including food. My favourite food was eggs, from *koogel-moogel*² to the ordinary hard-boiled variety. The owner of the house where we were living at the time kept chickens. It was my duty to gather earthworms from the garden, and the woman would reward me with my morning egg. I was quite calm about this task until the chicken-lady called me into the stable, where she was giving the earthworms I had gathered to the chickens. The effect on me was stunning. I watched the chickens greedily swallowing the worms, and I formed a clear conception of what those dear, tasty chicken eggs were really made of. It was many years before I was able to overcome the “earthworm block” as far as chicken eggs were concerned. One more fragment comes to mind: my first skis! It was Christmas 1949. Father covered the windows with thick blankets, so no one could see the light of the Christmas tree. (He had brought the tree home from the woods earlier under cover of darkness). That Christmas I got real skis. Even today I remember how happy I was then.

My parents

I had wonderful parents. My mother came from a large family in Järvamaa, where there were many children. Her parents died when she was 14 years old, and so she had to interrupt her education. Despite her modest schooling she had an avid interest in good literature, and there must not have been a single theatre performance that she skipped. Mother loved learning and did everything she could so that her children

² Dessert made of whipped egg yolks and sugar.

would get a good education. My paternal relatives were from the Kam-bja area in Tartumaa. Before the war, Father's family name had been Ehrlich, which was changed to what it is now when the names were "Estonianized."³ Before the war Father graduated from flight school, and was in the army, and so his was the typical Estonian soldier's journey through Siberia and the Estonian Corps.⁴ After the war Father worked in a food plant and finished his working years in the Viljandi Dairy.

My mother and father allowed me to live the way I wanted to, and to make my own choices. I remember the year 1964, when it was decided that I would go to Moscow. Before that, a former classmate and I decided to hitchhike our way to the Crimea. Years later, when I was a little smarter and had seen more of life in Russia, I asked my mother, "How could you have let me go?" Her answer was very simple (and most probably the truth): "You would have gone anyway, so why get into a fight about it?" I know that my mother cared for me deeply, and her death marked the end of my childhood. The only thing I deeply regret is that she did not live to see my return to Estonia. I was only able to tell her that I was coming. Oh, how happy she was!

School

My first school was in Rakvere. When I enrolled, a funny thing happened. I had managed to forget how to print my letters, and could not read the beginning of the spelling book. But the end of the spelling book was another thing altogether. That must have been the reason I finished the first grade with an honors certificate (that was the only one; the next *cum laude* came when I graduated from Moscow State University).

Stalin's death

Since I have a strange birthday (29 February 1944), the death of "Moustache" (*vunts*) was very unpleasant for me. On 9 March I was to have become a Young Pioneer, but Stalin's death postponed everything. I finished third grade in Viljandi's School No. 2, a seven-grade school, and spent the rest of my school years in that lovely small town. Though I had been a decent enough student up until finishing the seventh grade,

³ Estification of names, see Glossary.

⁴ Eighth Estonian Rifle Corps, see Glossary.

transferring to the famous Carl Robert Jakobson High School No. 1 in Viljandi must have given me a new personality. I was interested in everything else but studies (tennis, skiing, basketball, acting, etc). Our class was a difficult one, and a close-knit group besides: if we wanted to, we studied; if we didn't want to, we didn't bother. From ninth grade on my report card boasted a "final warning" in deportment, and this was followed by many sins and infractions, big and small, so much so that the earlier ones were forgotten. Already in those days I was in love with the concept of "plasma physics," the meaning of which was totally incomprehensible to me, but it raised my physics grade from a three to a five. Naturally, if one wanted to be accepted to university (especially to Moscow University), belonging to the Komsomol was a bonus.⁵ Our class managed to remain practically Komsomol-free until tenth grade, when I joined. In general, we made a big show out of joining the Komsomol. By belonging to their ranks, I caused a certain material loss to the organization: I persisted there for 12 times 12, or 144 months, and my dues were 2 kopecks a month until I was thrown out, which was a grand total of 2 roubles and 88 kopecks. During the early phase of blooming socialism, this was exactly the price of a bottle of "Moskovskaja Vodka." In 1970, due to strange circumstances, I found myself (apparently thanks to my thesis supervisor) in a tourist group of young astronomers, who went on a two-week trip to England. (This was my first trip abroad.) For the first time I saw Van Gogh's famous sunflowers live in the National Gallery. Salvador Dali, with his legendary clocks was also a discovery for me. But what amazed me the most was Turner. Since a part of the "Sputnik" vacation vouchers were paid for by the Komsomol, it seems to me that I put one over on that organization. In eleventh grade I was elected to the school Komsomol committee, but my career ended quickly and abruptly. I was thrown out for bad behavior. Though it is not nice to compare oneself to Estonian classics, during my last year of school I was balancing on a knife's-edge, just like Joosep Toots.⁶ But not all the teachers had a bad opinion of me—quite the opposite—they took me very seriously, and for that I am very thankful. My late mathematics teacher, Helene Vilja, was a wonderful person, who knew how to see the essence of a person, and my history teacher, Sunda Naanuri, was the same way; as was my guardian angel, Estonian language teacher Virgi

⁵ Komsomol—Communist Youth Organization, see Glossary.

⁶ Prankster character in Oskar Luts' classic school novel, *Kevade*.

Jalakas; so too was the physics teacher Tamara Maksimova, and many others. And so, in 1962 there I stood, an ordinary high school graduate, report card in hand, which in all honesty was nothing to be proud of, and the brazen conviction that Moscow State University awaited me. Never mind that her grade in Russian was “three minus.”

University Years

First you have to get into university. I took this very casually, since there was a national slot in plasma physics at Moscow University, and the entrance examinations were held in July at the Tallinn Polytechnic Institute. I submitted my application documents, and later discovered that there were over ten applicants. My grades on the five examinations were as follows: three fives (mathematics and physics), a four in English (which was unbelievable), and a standard three in Estonian. There was a committee, where they treated me quite aggressively (where do you think you are going, or something like that). It was hard to explain to them that my interest in physics had developed almost by chance, when I heard two women at the Viljandi market talking about someone who had gone to study plasma physics. It was also difficult to explain how after that I spent a summer teaching myself chemistry, about which I knew absolutely nothing. When I suddenly grasped Mendeleev’s table, my enthusiasm for that brilliant discovery must have been at least as great as Mendeleev’s own. I was not accepted to Moscow University, but with results like this, I could matriculate in Tartu University. Only later—I was from the provinces, after all—did I find out that my chances were practically zero anyway, since among the applicants was the son of the Estonian Communist Party’s first secretary at the time, Johannes Kābin. That was the first time I got seriously slapped in the face, and perhaps it was the first signal to me that one should not mock those weaker than oneself. Every now and then I find myself wanting to have a chat with the woman from that committee, who was so eager to demonstrate that there was no place in Moscow University for the likes of me... Putting it like a physicist, my mood was at the lowest level of energy, but I got over everything, and on 1 September 1962 I was handed a matriculation book in the great hall of Tartu State University. But imagine my disappointment: I was a student in the Russian group! There was stiff competition at that time in the Estonian group, and they must have thought that those who

failed in the competition for the republic's slots had good knowledge of Russian. Some of them certainly did, but not me. I remember the first lecture in advanced algebra, given by Gabovits. There was usually half a sentence in my notebook, followed by a blank, then another sentence fragment and more blanks... Three months later, during the winter examination session, I passed all my examinations in Russian and got very high marks. It was good to be in Tartu. In the second half of my first year, I was invited to work in the laboratory of Dr. Reinet, who had founded a school of aeroionization research in Tartu, which is being continued by prof. Hannes Tammet and his institute at Tartu University. I was on the Tartu State University women's tennis team; we went to competitions, and student life was very interesting indeed. Despite this, however, something was gnawing at my soul.

In the second year of university, the so-called recruiters (*hodok*) from Moscow University arrived, looking for good students to replace those who had flunked out of Moscow University. (In those days the competition for physics was ten-fifteen people per spot, and there were 500 places. Nevertheless, a hundred or so dropped out, and they needed replacing.) I happened to be among those the recruiters met with, but since I was not given any more specific information, I did not take matters very seriously. And then my "fate" intervened. There was a renaissance going on at the time in Tõravere—they wanted to resume research on stellar evolution, which had been the research specialty of one of Estonia's most prominent astronomers, Ernst Öpik, one of the first members of the Estonian Academy of Sciences. Since Öpik was *persona non grata* during the Soviet era, nobody spoke out loud about this connection. Docent Ivar Piir, who knew about my "love of plasma" and my wish to study in Moscow, recommended me as a candidate. On 15 April 1964 I was in the office of the scientific director of the FAI, Ch. Villmann, who convinced me that my great love for nuclear and plasma physics could best be fulfilled by studying stars. From time to time I find myself thinking that someone from on high has been directing my path, since that year on 15 April my fate indeed turned toward astrophysics. Before that I had felt a strong disgust for astronomy as a science: to me it seemed that all they dealt with was stupid planetary movements (how a ridiculous school curriculum can nip curiosity in the bud!) Only later did I discover that the cosmos was the most perfect physics laboratory, the likes of which we can never create for ourselves here on Earth. For me this fantastic cosmos that surrounds me is a kind of god, but not only the cosmos itself: the

people who were and are able to create something that makes us stop in our tracks, and feel something that is hard to describe.

But let us go back to the year 1964. The *hodok* found me to be an acceptable candidate to Moscow University, and so I was like a goat caught between two haystacks: serious physics or astrophysics. It was a done deal, as far as I was concerned. On 27 August 1964, I rode up the escalator in the newly-opened “Universitetski” metro station in Moscow (the view was familiar to me from Danielia’s film *I walk along the streets of Moscow*, which I had seen just before my trip), and I saw the main building of Moscow University in front of me. *I am, I did it!* Nevertheless, I spent my first months in a phase of deep dejection and self-reproach. After all, I was used to Tartu, where everybody loved me, and here I had to start all over again. As a backward provincial, I had to repeat the second year and make up all the first year astronomy courses, with a scholarship, of course. I was not particularly successful, since the courses in planetary movement were not exactly my favorites. On the spherical astronomy examination, I even managed to make the sun move backwards, rising in the west and setting in the east (contrary to the anecdote of those days: what does the Sun think every morning as it rises in the east: “Thank God, by evening I will be in the west already!”) But what a surprise it was, and how proud I was of the reputation of Tartu University, when a faculty member of Moscow University counted all of my Tartu examination grades in physics and mathematics. In those days the mathematics and physics schools in Moscow were among the best in the world. I have thought to myself, can we hold that standard at Tartu University today, or are we close to decline, as we gaze at our own navels (Tartu University is Estonia’s only university!). Clearly this somewhat depends on me, too, but not on me alone.

From then on there was fantastic Moscow with cultural life of the 1960s, which absorbed all my energies, and there was the Baltic Students’ Club. At that time Moscow was one of the most unusual Estonian Meccas. I shall mention only some of those studying in Moscow at the time: Mark Soosaar, Ingo Normet, Kaarin Raid, Peeter Tulviste, Valdur Saks. There were many-many others. This was the Moscow where we copied Bulgakov’s *Heart of a Dog* at night, a novel where I could sense Bulgakov, the Master from his own novel *The Master and Margarita*, listening to Ivan Bezdomnoi’s story about his meeting with Woland and saying, “How could I guess all that?” When reading

Heart of a Dog at the end of the 1960s, I had the same question on my mind: how could the young Bulgakov foresee, in 1925, the prototype of the Soviet person that our “beloved communist party” was trying to shape us into? There was Ljubimov’s Taganka, with the brilliant Alla Demidova and Vladimir Vyssotski. There was *Sovremennik* and the Art Theatre with the actors from Stanislavski’s Studio II; their virtuosity in acting was in a class by itself. There was “Princess Turandot” at the Vahtangov Theatre, where extraordinary actors such as Gritsenko, Uljanov, Jakovlev, and Lanovoi often improvised in the course of the performance. On 24 December 1964, my first Christmas away from Estonia, I happened to buy a ticket to Tschaikovsky’s *Swan Lake* at the Palace of Congresses, with Maia Plisetskaja in the lead role. Ballet at the Grand Theatre—that was something! What a marvel was Grigorovich’s production of *Legend of Love*! And later Maia Plisetskaja in Bizet’s *Carmen*. In Moscow I heard all of Mahler’s (my favorite composer) nine symphonies, under the direction of the extraordinary Kirill Kondrashin. I also remember the young conductor Neeme Järvi directing Paganini’s violin concerto in the Moscow Conservatory concert hall, with Viktor Tretjakov, the new winner of the Tschaikovsky competition as soloist. Tretjakov broke a string during the performance (you remember the legend about Paganini, when the devil broke his violin strings, and Paganini played to the end on one string). At any rate, a tremor ran through the audience when that happened.

I was like a huge sponge, greedily absorbing everything around me. No other stimulants were required to get a high: concerts and the theatre gave me everything I needed. You mustn’t think that I was a goody-goody during my university years: we drank wine, danced, and lived the happy (sometimes sad) life of young people. We were really poor. While in those days tickets were very cheap, they were still expensive for a university student (to get a ticket to a good theatre performance, one also had to buy a ticket for some less popular theatre or concert). I remember the days when our main diet was cabbage or carrot patties; the cheapest meat patty, mixed with bread, was only for Sundays. But I chose this way of life myself. The main character of one of my favorite novels, Robert Penn Warren’s *All the King’s Men* reflects on his life and emphasizes the simple, but also complex truth that events that do not seem to have any connection with each other are nevertheless connected. I would hardly be who I am today without Moscow and its cultural life.

Graduation day arrived. I got a Red Diploma, which is not necessarily a sign of my special talent. The reason was much more prosaic: I completed the semester with “fives,” because the ten extra rubles was a necessary sum for me, and the stipend was 30 rubles. However, since with the exception of being on the women’s tennis team, I had been “socially passive” at Moscow University, the hyperreactionary Party Bureau of the physics department refused to give me a recommendation to enter graduate school.⁷ The director of my bachelor’s thesis paid a special visit to the secretary of the Party bureau, explaining that playing tennis for the university was also very honorable “social work.” With that my “narrow social profile” turned into a “broad social face,” as my fellow students in Moscow put it, and I was recommended for entrance to graduate school. It is hard to believe that this was determined by something other than my first few scholarly publications and my cum laude diploma. We were the first, or at least among the first, to have to study that great nonsense proudly referred to as “scientific communism.” (To be honest, to this day I do not know what this is.) The course was scheduled for our fifth year, when we were thinking more about our diplomas than about that nonsense. At any rate, our group of astronomers was a good crew for the most part, and they had no interest in studying scientific communism. The main thing was to figure out how to make the instructor talk, so one didn’t have to do any talking. Often I was the politically underdeveloped *pribalt*,⁸ who asked stupid questions, which drove our instructor so crazy, that he would immediately attend to my political reeducation. But the seminar was *tu-tu*, and that was just what was needed. I remember that I got an especially strong reaction when I asked what a worker who milked cows was doing in the Supreme Soviet. I explained that I agreed, she might be a very capable person, but to lead a state? As always, though, for everything there is a price. The day of the examination arrived. Since I needed a five (for me ten rubles was a treasure), I was “re-educated.” I came out of it all clean, so positively scientifically communist, that I got the five I longed for. Yes, perhaps I was a two-faced as Janus, but

⁷ Soviet university students were expected to be involved in activities that benefitted the collective, e.g. to belong to political organizations, etc. This is what is meant by the euphemism “socially active” or “social work.” One might better translate this as “active in a socialist way.”

⁸ *Pribalt*, person from the Baltic republics.

I wanted to become an astrophysicist, and had to do it through political insincerity. I will play your game, but I am only playing. And there was a limit to how far I would play the game.

Professor Alla Massevits

I got acquainted with Prof. Alla Massevits in 1965, since in the third year one had to write a thesis, and she was the only one in the Soviet Union at the time who was doing research in stellar evolution. Legends circulated in astronomical circles about her as a strong, in Russian terms very educated, trilingual (German, English, French) authoritative person. Our acquaintance began in my fifth year, when she invited me to her home for the first time, on the 14th floor of a high-rise on Revolution Square. AG (as we referred to her behind her back at the Institute) directed both my bachelor's thesis and my candidate's dissertation. And the fact that I got my doctorate at quite a young age is also her doing.⁹ Our cooperation and coexistence have been and still are complicated, since personal and professional interests have been intertwined. At the time I got to know her, AG was the Soviet Union's Grand Lady, since she was working publicly on sputniks (the main movers and shakers, like Koroljov and others, did not make public appearances), and thus she was enormously popular, and represented scientists in all sorts of social organizations. In her were combined Georgian hospitality (her mother was Georgian) and Polish-German rationality. Since she had lived through the darkest days of the Stalin era, she knew how to keep her balance and tread a fine line in Soviet reality: on the one hand she protected and hired "useful people" (usually the children of midranking bosses or academic bosses), on the other hand she fostered us, we who had nothing except the huge longing to learn and to prove ourselves. The studies were very challenging: we were thrown into the water, and it was sink or swim. We had to show that we had the skills to swim. I think this is a really cruel approach, and certainly not acceptable to everyone, but apparently, for my kind of risk-taker, who enjoys the process of coming out of a situation even more than the outcome (which is boring), this kind of setup was beneficial in every way. In 1972 I defended my candidate's degree,

⁹ Depending on the field of specialization, the Soviet academic degree of *kandidat* was often equivalent to the Ph.D.

prematurely, according to the regulations. Though formally I was a junior researcher at the FAI in Estonia, I stayed on in Moscow and then spent almost a year on a Copernicus scholarship in Warsaw. This was a very important time for me as a scientist, since I was able to work with one of the most prominent astrophysicists of the time, professor B. Paczynski, now at Princeton University. Warsaw and its people remain my great love to this day.

In 1974 AG suddenly offered me the opportunity to work in Moscow permanently. I stayed on, even though there was nowhere to live, and over ten years I lived in twelve different places. All of this was worth it because of Moscow and its scientific community at the time. The seminars held by Zeldovits, Sklovsi, and Ginzburg were a school of advanced study for us all. We were ambitious, rivals in some ways, and here we were trained to face stiff competition. At that time most of us were not able to participate in international scholarly life. In 1975 AG proposed that I be appointed scientific secretary of the Institute, which meant closer collaboration with her. I accepted, since I have always been more interested in what I am able to do than in my position. Besides, I wanted to show that it was possible to work with AG and remain one's own person rather than her creature. Our relationship has been complicated, with very difficult periods, but after a certain time had passed, I was again a welcome guest on the 14th floor of Revolution Square. For me, AG was someone who taught me how to live. My gratitude to her is not formal, but deeply sincere.

More about Moscow

In 1980 I became a first-time apartment owner in the little town of Zvenigorod in Moscow *oblast*. The apartment consisted of a room sixteen meters square, a front hall, two meters square, a kitchen, and a WC and bath. The commute back and forth to work took “only” five hours. At that time I was very happy, since renting an apartment in Moscow was very expensive, even for a senior research scientist, and on top of that one was totally dependent on the owner's whims. (Once I was thrown out of an apartment on the second day after I had moved in. The owner went on a drinking binge and threw everyone out of the apartment, starting with his wife and ending with his tenant.) In that apartment I wrote my doctoral dissertation in 1983. I had half a year of “sabbatical” (*vabakäiku*) at work, though I did not devote most of

it to writing the dissertation. I have always had good luck with people who have looked on me positively, perhaps even too positively. And so one of the brightest astrophysicists in those days, Josef Šklovski, followed the progress of my dissertation in the pre-defense period. He was also assistant chair of the defense committee. I was lazy and would even have dragged things on a little, but I was presented with a schedule which I had to adhere to; everything had been decided for me. The defense, which took place on 30 November 1984, was successful. The only moment of “failure” was when I said my words of thanks. I wanted to thank AG, but I felt that if I said another word, I would have burst into tears. It must have been the release of nervous tension. Thank you, Moscow, for everything!

Back to Estonia

I always knew that the time would come when I would return to Estonia for good. I am an Estonian through and through. After my defense my good angels at Tõravere (I should say “Thank you very much to the governing council of Tõravere, which allowed me to go to Moscow and stay there!”) offered me the chance to return to Tartu University and to create opportunities to study astronomy. (That was when the department of theoretical physics and astrophysics was created.) I felt that my life in Moscow had come to an end, and on 10 October 1988 I was standing on the platform at the Tartu railway station in a heavy rain. This was my *comeback*. On 11 October I gave my first lecture in Estonian, which was extremely difficult for someone who for twenty years had talked about physics only in Russian or English. The work of an instructor was like learning a whole new trade. And it was difficult! I realized that the pure scientists’ contempt for university people was really brazen, in the literal sense of the word. All that existed for me now were my lectures and arduous attempts not to fall behind in my field. Up to 19 August 1991, the whole period of “awakening” in Estonia was somewhere in the background for me. I happened to be in Moscow and had planned to meet with a colleague who was living in Zvenigorod, when she called me in the morning and told me to turn on the TV. A state of emergency had been declared in Moscow, and a special committee had taken control of things. Military units were on their way to Moscow. That was a shock! We rode to work (500 meters from Red Square), but standing there we felt paralyzed. At the end of

the workday my friend and I decided we had to go to the White house. There were tanks on Red Square. Honestly, I was frightened of seeing those monsters on the city streets. There were many people like ourselves assembled at the White house, and they were building ridiculous barricades. This was basically the Moscow intelligentsia, which is now forgotten—they are not needed anymore (mind you, this is not very far from the current situation in Estonia). Now that is a night I will never forget. It was August, the days were still warm, but the nights were cool. We were coming directly from work, lightly dressed, but there was a wondrous kind of spirit among the people that night. Someone gave me more clothes to put on, there were bonfires burning. Around eleven o'clock at night we heard the rumbling of tank engines. I looked behind me, estimating the height of the iron fence...But then loud shouts of joy broke out: those were the first tanks to cross over to Yeltsin's side. That night they were all there together: Yeltsin (not the Yeltsin we see today, back then we were all in love with him), Rutskoi, Hasbulatov. The representatives of the Russian intelligentsia were there, who all believed it was possible to change things. At three o'clock at night there was another tense moment. A phone call came from the Sklifatšovski hospital: they had received a report to be prepared for the victims of a gas attack. A number of buckets of water were brought out, and instructions were broadcast over the radio as to what to do in case of a gas attack. That night we were really no more than token defenders of the White house. Late the next night something fantastic happened. I heard a direct broadcast from the hall of the Estonian Supreme Soviet, where they had passed the declaration of Estonian independence. Now that was really something! Even though I have been reproached, even here in Estonia, that physicists were puppets of the Soviet military machine, I can say that the physicists were perhaps the most independent and freedom-minded of all. I think the name Andrei Sakharov, father of the Soviet Union's hydrogen bomb, is still widely known today.

One might ask, why did I take the *putsch* so much to heart? When I saw those on TV who wanted to go back to the past, I knew that in that case I would become an emigrant, that I would have to leave Estonia. To be the slave of a totalitarian state again? Speaking of that, I should go back once again to the year 1979. Lauri Luud, the assistant director of the Tartu Observatory (who has since died), and I belonged to the Soviet Union's delegation to the "White Dwarves" symposium held in the USA. The world seemed wide open to me! I got many invitations to

work outside, and a very interesting research project was waiting for me in Helsinki (computer banks were very important back then). In 1980 I was to go to Finland for two months, but the Foreign Travel commission of the Central Committee denied me permission, and that was the beginning of my nine-year career as *ne vōjesdnaja*.¹⁰ I was not even allowed to go to Poland. I was no active dissident, but I was quite open in saying publicly what I thought about the idiocy that prevailed at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, and apparently some “good friend” noticed this and reported it to the proper authorities. I was not a Party member. The Foreign Travel Commissions were attached to the *raion* committees. During the time when my institute was located on Vavilov Street, the *raion* Party committee was normal enough; only when you were going abroad for the first time did you have to appear before some instructor or other and show one’s good side. Things changed completely when our institute moved *za Moskvoretšje*, to Pjaternitskaja Street. This was a typical proletarian *raion*, where folks like us were looked at very seriously. Going before the Foreign Travel Commission was like a holy ritual, to which we devoted hours (there was a long line, of course). Since the Foreign Travel Commission of the *raion* committee was a very serious matter, the pre-hearing was held in our own institute. It is a well known fact that the best defense is an offense. I came before the committee, and even before they had a chance to ask me anything, I asked whether they, as politically more conscious people could tell me how many members of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet were non-Party members. As I had guessed, even the smartest comrades did not know this, and I was quickly dismissed, saying they would give me a recommendation. After that the recommendation would usually be issued immediately. The first time I decided to “play a little joke” on the *raion* commission was about the middle of the ‘70s. I made a bet that I would go before the commission wearing jeans (mine were quite faded and worn), and that is what I did. That was a shock, of course. The Party secretary of the institute later explained in the commission that that was just the way the *pribalti*¹¹ were; AG gave me a thorough scolding. The next time around she personally inspected my appearance. Another time, when they asked me what newspaper I read (hoping, of course, that I would answer, *Pravda*), I answered, brazenly, *Golos*

¹⁰ Not to be allowed out (of the Soviet Union).

¹¹ People from the Baltic countries.

Naroda, (The People's Voice, which I never read, any more than I read *Pravda* in those days). That was a total shock to the commission; all the voices were hostile, and in a trembling voice I was asked *golos kakovo naroda?* (voice of what people?) to which I replied *estonskovo* (Estonian), and added that this was the newspaper of the Estonian Communist Party. I always had the feeling that if I did not pull some hooligan trick or other in that commission, it would be like being showered with filth. But maybe my little pranks earned their punishment, and my business trips abroad came to an end.

I remember Academic Zeldovič calling me up to extend his condolences: back then, he did not have “second cosmic speed” either (in our circles “first cosmic speed” meant permission to travel in socialist countries, and the “second” meant capitalist countries). Since in such situations I have always tried to keep a sense of humor, outwardly at least, I answered him that at least my spirits had gotten a lift—I was now on the same level as the famous academic.

Tartu

This is so recent a past that it is really too early to give an opinion. To be honest, I have a lazy nature, and wherever possible I try to get away with the minimum. On the basis of my Moscow experiences I knew that the less administrative work you have, the better. As an ordinary professor in Tartu, I tried in the beginning to stay away from any administrative activities. In 1992, after I was elected full professor of astrophysics, I was appointed to the reorganizing commission of the physics department of Tartu University. I sought information, and requested that all department members write a report about their activities over the last three years, and I would then write a summary for the commission. Unfortunately I could not predict the role that a tall, blond gentleman, then prorector of Tartu University, would play in my fate. Having passed through AG's “school,” I had no reverence for anyone. When I analyzed the reports that were submitted, I was really shaken! I discovered that the physicists at Tartu University published their results mostly in the Tartu University Research Reports, which to me was tantamount to writing for the wastebasket. For those farther removed from the scholarly world, let me say that this is not snobbery: in the sciences there are strict rules of the game, and if you play by them, you have it made; if not, you simply do not exist. In

that respect, doing science is very similar to sports. Would Erki Nool or Jaan Kirsipuu be who they are if they were top only in Estonia? However, I underestimated the tall gentleman I mentioned before, and my future career here in Estonia was in many ways connected with Jaak Aaviksoo's decision to make me the chair of the Tartu University Physics Department. Aaviksoo has a special intuition to find out what a person wants to hide. At least that was how it was in my case.

Hobbies

From the time I was five years old I have been in love with tennis. I remember standing on the Rakvere tennis court, my nose pressed up to the chain link fence, watching the fortunate ones on the court. I hit my first ball with a men's racquet, which to my misfortune flew out of my hand (it was very heavy). I hope to go on and on with playing tennis. It is the best solution for a person who spends most of their time "working with their head" to be out of that work for a certain time, since the game requires maximum concentration. I also love to read. When I was a child, books were the most valuable gifts, and I have never gotten over buying books. I can read in three languages. I enjoy memoirs and biographies. When I read N. Hamilton's book *Reckless Youth* about JFK, I was struck by some facts about the Kennedy family, some of which seemed hard to believe. Also very interesting was the history of the Moscow Art Theatre, and Stanislavski and Nemirovitš-Dantšenko. I enjoy very simple books as well, and my special favorites are Astrid Lindgren and Winnie-the-Pooh. When I am asked what would be the only book I would take along to a desert island, then on the one hand I would say the Bible (which I hope to get around to reading someday, but up till now the world has been so fantastically interesting that I would like to try everything and live multiple lives....) But my greatest favorite is M. Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*. And then there are art books and my great love of music; since I am so unmusical myself, this is hard to understand. I hear and feel a great deal of music in my head, but if I try and sing a few bars...

People

I venture to say that I have been lucky in life, and I have had the chance to meet many interesting people. During my Moscow days, many of them were among the top scientists in the field of contemporary

astronomy. Relations among strong personalities such as Academician Severnoi, Academician Sobolev, and corresponding member of the Academy Sklovski were often quite complicated. However, they were warm and friendly with me. I have thought to myself why this was so, but it may have simply been because I was not ready to “sell” anyone for the sake of the moment’s opportunity. I have been told things like: “Academician N does not like X, whom you are spending time with. Cut things off with them.” Usually I sent such recommendations to..., and I am convinced that one has to strive to be one’s own person and not put oneself up for sale.

When I was young my world was very black and white, but now I have come to the understanding that it is not a good idea to make snap decisions, before comprehending the motives. In one thing I have remained true to the ideals of my youth: I despise people who have done base things for the sake of career and money. I can forgive someone who betrayed their friends in order to save their relatives, especially when I think about hard times in the Soviet Union, but I will never forgive those who betrayed for the sake of career and money. It is physically revolting to me to be with those who worship the “bosses” and I have always tried to clue them in quickly that I am not among those who should be loved because of her position. Perhaps that is why I hate totalitarian regimes so much, as they are all built on the same principle: to bring out what is the basest in people. There is something hidden deep inside all of us that we would not like to see in ourselves in normal circumstances. Maybe that is why I felt I was being hit below the belt when in February 1998 after the election of the rector of the university, first the Baltic News Service (BNS) and after that the newspaper *Postimees* released the “hot news” about my possible “buyability.” Such things I cannot forgive. Even though I have no desire to wish a trial on anyone, I found myself having to go to court. I knew that if I did not do so, I would never forgive myself. I would like to add that I have always been enamored of professionals, and inspired by them. What I mean are real professionals, and it does not matter in what field. Work that is done professionally and on a high level is just as valuable as the work of an academic, and sometimes even more so.



Tiia Allas

BORN 1973

I can clearly imagine the August night when my mother, already in labor, walked two to three kilometers to her sister's house in Rõuge. From there they drove her to the hospital. Father stayed behind at the neighbor's house, partying in the sauna, along with some Latvians, probably. He never cared about "women's business," and children began to matter when they could be put to work and to good use. But maybe

the situation just before I was born was not as bad as I think. From what I have been told, my paternal grandmother Emilie Allas accompanied my mother through the thick woods.

At any rate, I was born on 19 August 1973 in the old Võru hospital, and the birth was normal in every way. I was driven home in a truck, most likely in the cab. Home meant Sänna, the village where writers Artur Adson and Juhan Jaik were born, but it is a questionable thing to boast about such things in this story. In Sänna lived my maternal grandmother Elsa Kivi and my grandfather Arnold Kivi. Sänna was my home, in the literal sense of the world until 1988, but in a more indirect way, forever.

It is hard to remember any marks of Soviet society from my childhood; fortunately, a small child does not know how to regard them in this abstract way. My mother worked in the laboratory at the Võru hospital, and my father at the Võru meat factory. In the 1960s, Mother and Father bought the upper story of a house in Võru, but they did not spend much time there. Instead, they bounced back and forth from town—Sänna or Võru, to the country. I grew up mostly in Sänna, and was raised by my grandmother and grandfather. Life was more or less

normal until I turned four or, to be more exact, until the birth of my brother Anti on 26 November 1977.

In those days, an infectious disease referred to as staphylococcus was rampant, and many newborns died of it. As far as I remember, it was a severe intestinal illness. Anti was born a bit prematurely, but that was in itself no problem. Some time later he was back in the hospital with staphylococcus. Recently I heard from my aunt that at upon demand of my father, and with his signature, the doctors had given Anti a heavy dose of antibiotics at a critical moment. That most probably was what saved his life. At that point my mother's nerves could not hold out, and she was put in the psychiatric hospital, first in Võru, then Tartu, then Jämejala in Viljandi. I should add that it would be possible to probe and be more precise about what really happened, but I feel I am not up to it. Even now, at the age of 27. That was an extremely dark time in our family's story, and I do not want to stir up all the bad things that happened.

At any rate, Mother collapsed and went to the hospital, and my sick infant brother Anti and I were left in the care of our Sänna grandparents. We called Grandmother "Emmu" and Grandfather "Vantsi." At that time, Emmu was already 66 years old, and Vants 69. They had their own place and the livestock to tend, and it was not easy for them. Father rarely showed up, and had never even touched his children—he himself had probably never been treated like a human being, held and cuddled. One can only imagine Emmu and Vants' constant worry about the children and their mother. I do remember that from time to time, when the most critical stage was over, Emmu would go to the hospital with Anti, and I would stay at home with Vants. My aunts, Mother's sisters, helped too. Mother's younger sister Liivi and her husband worked at the Võru dairy. When the dairy trucks started out on their rounds from Võru, she would pack fresh *kefir* along, which was good for the little boy's sick belly. In those days it was already practically impossible to get fresh *kefir* at the village store, and Grandfather did not have the time to stand around waiting for the truck to come at the Sänna store, a kilometer and a half away. Aunt Ilme, who lived in Rõuge, also helped out, and at her initiative they started searching for the child's father, but those efforts came to nothing. Besides, they were all afraid of my father's unpredictable temper, and continued to fear him for years. But that is another nuance of my story, and I need to restrain myself from going there.

Speaking of my Võru aunt Liivi and her husband Elmar, their lives are a pretty accurate reflection of the times we were living in. They had both studied to be master cheese and butter makers at Õisu. At least Aunt Liivi had. In today's sense they were skilled workers, which in those days meant that they were quite well off. When they moved from the Vastseliina factory to Võru, they got a three-room apartment in the *vahtse*, the dairy's apartment building. And as we all know, you could literally swim in the dairy products that family had available to them. There was enough cream, butter, cottage cheese to go around among the relatives, not to speak of the chance to get ahold of scarce goods. In other words, whenever Liivi and Elmar came to the country, they would bring a big sack of fresh food. Everyone in Säanna was up to their ears with cheese: big wheels of it would last so long they would go moldy. When I think back on all that now, my mouth starts watering, especially when I look at a horribly expensive little chunk of cheese in the supermarket. When Liivi and Elmar came to the country, each child would be handed a container of fresh cream to eat—those were unbelievable times! My loveliest Christmas memories are also connected with Aunt Liivi. In retrospect I have come to understand that these memories indeed referred to Christmas. Aunt Liivi would usually come to the country on the early morning bus, when it was still dark. I slept in the front house (*edetare*). Muki, the dog, would start barking, and some time later I would recognize Aunt Liivi's voice. The amazing smell of gingerbread wafted through the door leading from my room into the kitchen. The cookies were home-baked, as Liivi had a knack for cooking. Nobody ever said the word *jõul* (Christmas), even though all three of Emmu and Vants' daughters would always gather at Säanna at that time of year with their husbands and children. My mother would come, too, provided she wasn't in the hospital. She was in and out of the hospital for a good many years.

My grandfather was very proud of his nationality,¹ and neither he nor my grandmother could stand communism. During the war a bomb dropped on the house they had built (*vahtse*, as they called it) and it burned to the ground. Quite possibly this is what saved them from being sent to Siberia, but it brought much sorrow and hardship. After the war they built a new house. Considering the circumstances of the

¹ The compound word *eestimeelne* is difficult to translate, and basically means patriotic.

times, I see this as a piece of heroism. A miracle, if one adds in the fact that Grandfather was honest to the core, and never manipulated his way into anything. Unlike our neighbors from Mäetare, who were the exact opposite. The man was a tractor driver and his wife stayed at home. She was a Petseri Russian, perhaps a *setu*, with an unpleasant personality.² We called her Mari, Maanja, or Mariihen, and to this day she speaks Estonian with a heavy accent. We would quarrel with them from time to time, and if I may say so, I think it was their thick-headedness that played a big part in these tiffs. Because he was a tractor driver, Robu (Robert) had free access to farm equipment, and could haul in load upon load of hay for his cows, while my grandfather had to get everything the honest way. Manni always found a reason to say something bad about our family, whether she complained at the office or, later, registering complaints against my grandfather at the village soviet.³ “See, he’s living at the Kivi place without a residence permit.” She would pass the time getting on other people’s nerves.

It all seems trivial and ridiculous in retrospect, but back in those days it was the stuff of life, that I had a part in as a child. At any rate, as concerns our wonderful neighbors, they had a very Slavic quirk—on the one hand Mariihen would attend church every Sunday in the Võru Orthodox church twenty kilometers away, while Robu, who must have been a war veteran, took part in the circus that was put on for the veterans in those days. Not to speak of all the bonuses. I can only guess at the bitterness in Grandfather’s heart: he had to beg and bribe tractor drivers for all he was worth, mostly with vodka. Grandfather was not a man for machines; horses were what he knew and loved, the horses that the Soviet regime took away from him. All he could borrow at the *sovhoz* stable were old nags. The neighbors, deeply religious on the one hand, Soviet-minded on the other, had it ten times easier: the dishonest way.

I am conscious of the fact that I’m not quite able to paint striking pictures of life in a Soviet village. For example, the mail arrived late in the evening, sometimes even the next day. We subscribed to *The People’s Voice* (*Rahva Hää*), and the local newspaper, *Worker’s Life* (*Tööraha Elu*), *Little Star* (*Täheke*), and, later on, *Spark* (*Säde*) for me. The mailman, Jõe Virve, was a woman with strange habits. At some

² Setu, see Glossary.

³ Village council in Soviet times, see Glossary.

point she had something going with a somewhat crazy young tractor driver, whom the *sovhoz* had entrusted with a new tractor. They would tear around in it as if it were a car, sitting in the cab with the curtains drawn. What bravura! That was in the middle of the 80s, as if they could sense the grand finale coming. As we all know, in the 1980s most people used work vehicles for their own purposes, as much as they possibly could. (Oh, well, things are not any different today, but that is a different story).

In 1980 I started school, which might count as the beginning of my conscious experience and insight into things Soviet. While most of the children from our village went to the Nursi school, Father enrolled me at Lepistu, since he was working at the Sverdlov *kolkhoz*, at that time as a veterinarian. If one goes by the administrative structure of that time, the *kolkhoz* by the name of Sverdlov, with Tsooru as its central village, was next to the Rõuge *sovhoz*.⁴

Starting school was a story in itself, at least for me. To this day I am amazed that nightmare did not out and out paralyze me psychologically. I was Emmu and Vants' child, and all but pathologically attached to them. When Grandmother would go to the neighbors' place and leave me at home asleep, I would wake up, and not finding her there, I would start crying hysterically. My aunt's children, who were a little older than me, and who spent their summers in the country, would enjoy teasing me about it, and often lie and tell me that Emmu had left home. I really would get terribly hysterical.

By the time I started school, Mother's health had improved a bit; I remember her coming along with me for the first few days. That was not how it was with other children, so there was the first reason for teasing right there. At any rate, when the first bus did not come, I would go back to the schoolhouse sobbing crazily, and they would call my callous father, who, if he came at all, would chew me out. Most of the time he did not pay any attention to the phone calls. Anyway, I remember one time very clearly, during mud season, when I was walking from the school to the bus station and heard people talking at the auto mechanic's shop: "I don't know, in this kind of weather the buses are surely not running."⁵ That was all it took for me to burst into tears and

⁴ *Kolkhoz-sovhoz* administrative structure (*haldusjaotus*, *naabermajand*), see Glossary.

⁵ In local dialect, *ei tiiaq, säändse nilbega külh bussiq ei sõida*.

hightail it back to the schoolhouse, and the carousel of horrors began all over again.

Soon—I think it was in first grade—they recruited October Children. I vaguely remember—but probably am recalling it in retrospect—that this created a big to-do for the folks at home, even some fear. They might have put it this way: “they want to make them into little communists from the get go.” Neither Grandfather nor Father could stand communists, but unfortunately they could not stand each other either: Grandfather was honest to the core, very respected in the village, but my father was a brutal man, a manipulator, and other such things. For no reason at all, and with real mean-spiritedness, Father was in the habit of blaming everything bad connected with the children on Mother or on the grandparents. I remember how one time he cursed Grandfather for my being a Red October Child, later an activist in the Young Pioneers. No comments.

The Lepistu School, at that time an eight-grade school, and the place where I got my basic education, was extremely and idiotically Red. When I later told stories about it to my university friends they were dumbstruck, since by the 1980s in the city schools Soviet patriotism and propaganda existed only on paper, if even that. But for us it was all very much alive.

I did not have difficulties with my studies—I was lazy enough to start with, but I started pulling almost all fives from 3rd grade on, without much effort. According to the strategy nailed in place for Young Pioneer leaders, the best students were the first ones to be recruited, and they were in turn to be honored with the assignment of patrol or group leaders, promoted, sent to represent the *raion* in competitions, allowed to experience the sweet taste of power.⁶ All of this brought bonus points to the school and made it stand out among the rest.

The Young Pioneer period started in grade four, and because of my father’s difficult personality I must have hidden my neckerchief and Lenin certificates of honor, which I got plenty of. I can remember the regional Pioneer meetings especially clearly, where all the Pioneers had to march. Before that there had been intense marching drills. Since I was tall and not endowed with great physical abilities, marching was quite a challenge for me at first; I would wave my hands in and out, not back and forth in parallel motion the way it was supposed to be.

⁶ *Raion*, see Glossary.

It's true that now I get the urge to laugh out loud at all of this. But rather, I recall the hilarious memory of how because of a bladder infection, I wet my pants right in front of the whole regional *malev*,⁷ right at the moment we gave the salute. At least I could feel the hot liquid running down my legs under my thick stockings.

The real idiotic stuff happened during my time as an October child. Our group leader—however they referred to leaders in those days—was a brutal, power-hungry girl who took us out on hikes, and allowed her friends to throw stones into the river, but not her enemies. What discrimination and class formation took place from the ground up, all under the guise of slogans about liberty-equality-fraternity!

We had to care for the graves of war heroes on a regular basis, and lots of Red events were held there. Since Father did not take me to any political assemblies, which often took place at night, I had to ride my bicycle, or stay with a friend, and that created lots of problems, mostly headaches for my nervous-about-anything mother and Emmu.

It must have been in fourth or fifth grade that we had to take care of a war veteran who suffered from some sort of tuberculosis, it may have even been active. His name was Andrei Savik (though I won't swear by it), and he got around in a wheelchair. His wife was quite bent over. They managed somehow with getting firewood and water, and our visits were a big circus act of hypocritical patriotism. Of course we got praised for it, even in the newspapers. My good friend's father was an ambulance driver, from a very hard-working family (Hero Workers were generally not regarded highly, due to their household earnings).⁸ From later on I remember the scandal, which spread as a rumor in the village, that when Savik was about to die, my friend's father was on duty and did not take off right away. But looking back on it, if my memory does not fail me, the Pioneer leader, one of our lead teachers, mocked my friend in front of the whole group for her father's despicable deed.

As I said earlier, I was tall, and rather poor, having to live on my mother's invalid's pension: an *ummamuudu* from childhood on.⁹ Thus I heard plenty of the usual teasing: "cow" and "horse" (*hobõnõ*) were the main terms of endearment. My good grades were my trump card,

⁷ *Malev*—ancient Estonian word for army unit, or host.

⁸ Ironical statement. "Hero workers," see Glossary.

⁹ *Ummamuudu* (*oma moodi*), in the meaning of strange bird.

as well as my power and “good example”(!!!) as a Pioneer leader. I also got along well with most of the girls. Now, as an adult, I do not regret for a moment the strict communist discipline I was subjected to, because as a child I did not take the ideology seriously; the nonsense simply did not stick in a conscious or fanatical-utopian way. But being in the forefront compensated for my physical and financial deficiencies and prevented the development of complexes for a lifetime. I also learned an unforgettable lesson about being a marionette.

Yes indeed, the Red-mindedness of Lepistu School was legendary: I still remember how in sixth or seventh grade a boy a year younger than me, a Pioneer of course, had to repent of his offenses by kneeling at a public meeting and kissing the flag. It seems there was no such requirement listed even in the instructions that came down from above—but you never know, those were the Great Red Dragon’s last convulsions before the end. It was the year 1985 or 1986.

Because of my home background I was the one who took up the topic of the Estonian time and who knows what else in history lessons. The history teacher, born in the Estonian time, chuckled quietly to himself. Civil defense instruction was especially stringent in our school, and in fifth grade it was taught by the lead teacher. He emphasized that the Soviet Union had no chemical weapons; never mind that the history teacher had just told us the exact opposite. So we made sure the two met face to face—that was a sweet moment, in which all the players knew what comedy they were playing.

Civil defense drills and training courses went on all the time—they must have been nation-wide. The whole school was ordered into the basement of school assistant¹⁰ Pärja, and they would teach us how to walk along a narrow carpet outside. Since I was the only one living in a different district and had farther to come, I was allowed to stay home. We were even supposed to cover the windows with blankets, I think. All of this—civil defense training and listening to *Voice of America* every night, created a physically palpable fear of war in me. There was a constant rustling sound over the broadcast, you had to keep turning the radio or holding your hand next to the antenna. *Näet, kuis sekäse* (See how they messed it up), Father and Grandfather would swear at the rattling and the scrambling of the signal. I remember very clearly how one time I was sitting on Grandfather’s couch next to the flue and felt

¹⁰ School assistant, *koolitädi*.

that the war would surely begin; life was over now, after a slow suffocation, it would really end. I imagined clearly to myself how to behave in case of a nuclear war, and what the world was going to look like. It's the honest truth: civil defense was one of the subjects that most touched my soul.

By the time I finished school in spring 1988, the first heady reports of the blue-black-and-white flag coming out of hiding were reaching the countryside. Our school director took national patriotism just as seriously as he had taken the Red stuff. Indeed, rural schoolteachers were not bad people, but they were just a little stupid, limited, and small-minded. They quarreled among themselves, creating rifts among the children. The director of studies took a dislike to me and my friend. She promoted and recognized the ones who couldn't handle their studies but were hard-working. The true, potential loyal cadres of the working class. She would mock us a good deal, but we were backed by the school director. But life has shown that *potemkinism*¹¹ and small-mindedness have not disappeared from the face of the earth—I am sincerely grateful to all of my elementary school teachers for teaching me that lesson. All sarcasm aside, I have very warm memories of that school, as opposed to the mammoth city high school, which hardly left me with any memories at all. Not even bad ones. Though it may seem ungrateful, I often think to myself: for me the Võru high school was like the WC where one simply had to go, without any feelings, and with a little trace of repulsion, even though I graduated from that school, too, with “fives.” The first bright period in my life was in those days in elementary school (I won *raion* competitions in quiz shows, went back and forth to Tallinn where the newspaper *Spark* and the magazine *Pioneer* organized events which were educational in the real sense, without Red propaganda). While in elementary school I knew that I would go on to study journalism, but high school managed to kill all those hopes and dreams. When I got ready to apply for university, I could no longer remember what I had previously regarded as a definite goal.

As I said before, money was tight while I was in elementary school. Mother was very worried about how she, as an invalid, could raise her children, because Father simply did not give us any money. True, he would drive us around to Latvia and Russia to buy things, even for the children, but since we had no respect for him, we did not really want

¹¹ Potemkinism, see Glossary.

those trips, let alone the things. The children whose parents worked at a farm, for example, got ten rubles for pocket money on class excursions, but I had to make do with three or four. However, this did not create any inferiority complexes, since there really weren't class distinctions in those days, not in the capitalist sense, anyway.

Of course we did not get as much candy and things as the others did. Now I can only be happy about this, but in those days, granted, it did cause some bitterness. I remember how in the summer Grandfather would send us to the store to buy bread for the cows, and we were only allowed to buy hard candy or Iris candy, never chocolate, which was too expensive. Pepsi-Cola was also a rare luxury. I could write a whole novella about the village store, about waiting for the supply trucks to arrive. For years our grandfather would buy bread from the store to feed the animals, since it was too complicated and expensive to get a truck to bring in animal feed. A loaf of bread cost twelve, fourteen, or sixteen kopecks. Those village folks who could afford the time would hang out at the store for a half a day. I can imagine what colorful chronicles of village life were born there.

Without a doubt my high school years (1988–1991) were shadowed by puberty, which happened in Estonia, too, just like anywhere else, and even from a commercial perspective. Food provisions were rationed, but we rural people were not affected by these, since we always had meat, milk, and eggs from home. But the clothing and footwear situation was terrible. In the so-called “commission shops” springing up in cellars, they were already selling western goods, but the prices were completely outrageous. For a horse's foot like mine—size 41–42, there were no shoes to be found anywhere, and I did not have any connections, either. Just go on and try and sit next to city children, whose general attitude toward anyone from somewhere else was, what a bunch of hicks!

I should go back and explain a little more about the Soviet quality of life, as background for what I will go on to argue. As I said, during my school days I could not tell the difference between rich and poor. In my teenage years it finally sharply came home to me that the question was not lack of money, but a complete deficit of goods. The stores were empty, and there was nothing to buy. When she was working, Mother had plenty of connections; some Aunt Helbe or other would set aside children's books for me, but when she got ill, Mother pulled away from her “circles.” And so I had no elegant western clothes to strut around

in. Just so, to strut around in, since everyone had some kind of clothes, which kept them warm and healthy. For years my mother's invalid pension was 73 roubles, Grandmother's pension 43, and Grandfather's 47. Now I remember that at the Antsla country fair there was a long line-up for sweatpants, which they were selling for over 100 rubles. Looking back now, we can joke about it: what a good thing it was that there was nothing to buy, since we wouldn't have had money for it anyway. My cousins would come from the city wearing fashionable stuff, and that did make me pretty bitter. (Today, I think to myself, what pigs they were; in their own opinion they were bringing culture to the country, which really meant the destruction of all that was *uma* (my own)). I mocked them, and nagged Mother about why we didn't have anything. I sulked and pouted something awful. I can imagine what pain that must have caused her. Grandmother would keep on saying, *pääasi, et rõivas terveq ja puhas um* (the main thing is that the clothes are clean and mended), reminding us of the days right after the war, when children's garments would be made out of old adult clothing.

When I was in grade seven and eight, I would go on my own to the *raion* center, Võru, where there would often be huge line by the door of the shoe store. I joined the queue, and once even found a pair of pink tennis shoes, what a joy that was. When I recall all that idiocy and misery, it brings on tears mixed with laughter. Then, just as these days, teenagers would be struck by waves of fashion. One summer the boom was skirts, pants, and shirts made out of pink and blue cotton fabric. (Grandfather said he was ashamed of us in front of the whole village—*kääväq niguq alusmõsuga ilma pääl*, you're running around all over the place in underwear). With my cousin Kati's example, I sewed something for myself, and it was so "memorable," that from that day on I have never picked up a needle again. For ordinary people, the totalitarianism of those times meant sameness—pink and blue clothes, identical living room storage units, wooden shoes, velvet slacks, or whatever other waves of fashion passed through. There was little tolerance for differences; being like the others was the highest goal and bliss.

By 1985 or 1986 Mother was already feeling well enough to begin working in the kitchen of the Lepistu School, which my brother was also attending. In the school cafeteria the food was quite normal, and in the darkness behind all the pots and pans my brother and I would sometimes get an extra helping of dessert or some other delicacy. At the end of seventh grade our class was hit by permanent wave madness.

I—the girl whose folks were so polite and conservative, went to town and had my hair curled. (Another example of how “total” everything was, beginning with style) A few days later during recess my mother dragged me by the hair into a storeroom under the staircase, and announced that I was going to be thrown out of school. This, of course, was terrible to the ultimate degree; who was going to throw out the student who had brought the school the greatest degree of positive attention?

In 1988, times changed both in the social and family sense. To the best of our knowledge, Father was there the whole time, in a formal-physical sense, that is. What did that mean? Let me say once and for all that from the time I was a child until today I have never respected my father; he is a blank spot for me, even though he is very tiresome and violent. Of course there were problems all along when I was living with my grandparents. *We* didn’t have the problems, but Mother and Father did, since Grandfather could not stand lazy and deceptive people. We have brutally resented our mother’s sick weakness in not getting rid of Father, but what can we do—somehow they coexist to this day. So much for that. Anyway, in his tyrannical way, Father dragged us off to Rõuge, to his home, or rather to live with our paternal grandmother. There I began attending the F. R. Kreutzwald High School No. 1 in Võru.

Our monstrous family settled down to live in Rõuge, nearby to be precise, in the village of Kiidi. At Father’s urging we got ourselves some livestock, even though the stable was in awful shape, with no floor, ready to fall over at any minute. There our (probably eternally) sick mother began milking cows, slaving over farm work, and we, children did, too. That was during the big wave of people “returning to the land” and taking back the farms. For some time, my father went back and forth to Tsooru, twenty kilometers away, where in the end he worked as a supplier of animals for slaughter, before that as a veterinarian. As concerns him, one cannot talk about working—in my opinion, he conducted his own business day in, day out, and wormed his way through as best he could. What heaps of scrap iron he would bring home by the ton! In those days you couldn’t call that theft, since everybody was doing it, whoever got close enough to something they could get their hands on. So-called theft from the state was the norm. As the saying goes, whatever the children see, they start to imitate. But take my word for it—my brother’s and my life credo is uncompromising

honesty, learned from the example of Grandfather. I think that is the way it will be till my dying day.

Since we were getting more aware by the day, we could at least show what we thought of slave labor farming by showing an angry face. (I have nothing against farm work, but that it was forced on us). How difficult it is to keep livestock in a stable without a floor. Or to make hay in those conditions. I remember the days I worked in the meadow from six in the morning until eight o'clock at night. That must have been the time I began getting varicose veins, inherited from my mother's side. From the money that came in for potatoes, beets, and milk, there began to be a little left for us, now in Estonian crowns. We were grown up now, and mutiny was constantly in the air: if we get nothing for our work, we'll organize a rebellion. Where would Father find better workers? There were more things to buy in the shops, and my brother and I had some rudimentary amount of money. The worst times were over, which meant that what mattered was not that humiliating factor of having connections, but money. My brother and I have often discussed this and concluded that during the Soviet times we had a more miserable life than in the days of the newborn Estonian republic. To this day. But just in case, I'll spit three times over my shoulder, lest I bring on bad luck.

As my report shows, during the Soviet times my nearest and dearest lived like poor maggots. Even though Father finagled ways to steal from *sovhozes* and *kolkhozes*, it was old stuff, not new things. Neither riches in the literal sense nor good fortune in the general sense materialized for him. Those twenty thousand or so rubles hidden in a stocking for a rainy day were swallowed up by the currency reform—he could have spent some of it while we were children, and given us spending money for candy or the movies. But now that I am older, I understand that then our teeth might have been in even sadder shape, and our eyes much weaker.

As I said, I have tremendous respect for my grandparents, who gave me the ethical foundation for my whole life. The values and attitude to life that belonged to the first Estonian republic. Emmu was the one who taught all of her seven grandchildren to read. She had completed six grades at the Rõuge School, but I daresay she is a very educated person. As I see it, the reason for my mother and her two sisters' lack of a sense of self, their pettiness and narrow mindedness is the Soviet regime, which took children away from their parents, raising

them with values diametrically opposed to the ones that had sustained our forebears for centuries. My parents' lovely years of youth were in the 1960s, when a wave of carefree living flowed over them, compared to the postwar years. For that reason that generation sunk into the deepest social crisis when the Estonian republic was restored. This was especially true in the countryside.

I am glad that I saw and experienced Soviet reality personally. Now, working as a newspaper reporter in south Estonia, this is very beneficial for understanding how life is today. Since this has been a conservative region for hundreds of years (the good side of which is language preservation), it is understandable that there is a good deal of the Soviet in people's attitudes and behavior. I have also benefited from the hardships I lived through as a child. I could especially see this last year, when I drew up a project "The Võru Dialect Newspaper and Internet Editions," which on 1 August 2000 became the first Võru-language newspaper, *Uma Leht*.

It is good to live the way Grandmother and Grandfather did, working from morning till night, and often into the night as well. Working with your whole heart and soul, doing what one feels called to, motivated by one's dear southern Estonian environment and driven by regional patriotism. My mother and father's generation became alienated from real work, and this was a factor that paralyzed their whole lives. They were forced by ideology to deny their origins—what I mean is, south Estonia in general. For example, when one lifetime official, the director of today's Räpina Advanced Gardening School was asked on his 60th birthday where his birthplace was, he did not want to mention the village of Pankjavitsa, in Setumaa, which now lies on the other side of the Russian–Estonian border as his birthplace. Last year my brother graduated from agricultural college, and is now working on his master's degree. He is also working in the Võru county government as director of the construction and planning department. I graduated from Tartu University in 1997 in Estonian philology, and even before graduating got a job as cultural editor at AS Põlva Koit. In Grandmother's way of putting it, I have gotten everything I own, from a needle all the way up to an apartment, with money earned from honest work. The reason things have gone well for me (in the sense of starting my own life) is the hard life I experienced as a child, and the different faces the times have shown to me.

As I encounter today's daily realities, I have often thought about the fact that I would never have wanted to be a child in the 1990s, in the painful years of emergence of the independent republic. Not even as the child of rich folks. My childhood at the end of the 1970s and the 1980s was (without a shred of irony) happy—compared to conditions today. On my mother's monthly income of 73 rubles, three family members could live without psychic wounds. On today's monthly minimum salary that would be morally impossible (even considering all the subsidies). Without a doubt ideological pressure, harassment, enslavement—as it was in the Soviet times—was terrible, and for that reason I do not wish for those times to return. But I think those born in 1972 and 1973 are a fortunate generation: for example, for those entering university in 1991 a new academic system was just being put in place, not to mention the content of the education. Our generation was given a chance to experience then and now “on their own skin,” to live with both socialism and capitalism. Who can imagine what lies ahead for us?

GLOSSARY

Agricultural Societies (*Põllumeeste Seltsid*)—Societies founded in the second half of the 19th century to further agricultural education and innovation. The lectures and exhibitions organized by the societies were an important aspect in the lives of small landowners, who were purchasing land and developing their own farms. The first of the societies were formed in northern Livland, which was economically more advanced than Estland (in Tartu and Pärnu in 1870, Viljandi in 1871). At first the numbers and membership were limited, but in the last half of the 1890s, forty-five new societies were established. Some of the Estonian organizations were connected to the Baltic-German agricultural organizations, such as the Livland Public Benefit and Economic Society. The political activism of the Agricultural Societies toward the end of the 19th century created significant tensions, as they were justly regarded as seedbeds for nationalism.

Anketa—Biographical summary required in the Soviet era for application for employment and admission to educational institutions, often written as a free composition (without a set form to fill out). In addition to date and place of birth, educational background, and class origin, up to Stalin's death (1953), political questions had to be answered, not only concerning oneself, but family and relatives: What one's parents or grandparents had done during the Russian Revolution, what political parties and organizations (Home Guard, Defense League, etc.) they had belonged to, whether anyone had fought in the German Army during World War II or fled abroad. Most, if not all institutions had their cadres department and cadres officials, responsible for eliciting and keeping the documentation. After Stalin's death the forms were simplified. Use of the *anketa* was discontinued at the end of the Soviet regime, though a precise endpoint has not been documented. The *anketa* was also a metaphor: if someone's "*anketa* was not clean," this meant they had "inappropriate" aspects in their biography—a father in the woods with the Forest Brothers, a mother in Sweden, or one had never belonged to the Young Pioneers.

Baltic Chain—A 600 km long human chain from Tallinn to Vilnius on 23 August 1989, the 50th anniversary of the secret protocols of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact.

Bases Treaty—"Mutual Assistance Pact" between Estonia and the Soviet Union on 28 September 1939 under which 25,000 Soviet troops were to be stationed in military bases on Estonian soil. The pact was to be in effect for 10 years. Naval and air bases were established on the islands of Saaremaa and Hiiumaa, and the town of Paldiski, 50 km from Tallinn. In reality

this pact was part of the implementation of the secret Nazi–Soviet negotiations leading to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact on 23 August 1939, the secret protocol of which assigned Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to the Soviet sphere of influence, in exchange for meeting additional German interests in Poland. Additional pressure was put on Estonia by the amassing of 160,000 Soviet troops (ten times the size of Estonia’s peacetime army) at the Estonian border by the second half of September; Estonian air space was violated, and after the escape of the interned Polish submarine *Orzel* from Tallinn harbour on 17 September, the Soviet Union claimed the right to patrol Estonia’s territorial waters. The international press regarded the mutual assistance pact as evidence of a pessimistic future for the Estonian republic.

Collectivization of agriculture—The liquidation of privately-owned farms during the first decade of the Soviet Era, followed by the founding of *kolkhozes* and *sovhozes*. In the land reform initiated in 1940 and continued in 1944, the land was expropriated and declared to belong to the state. A family could keep no more than 30 hectares for private use. The first *kolkhoz* was founded in Saaremaa in 1947. People began joining *kolkhozes* in larger numbers in 1949–1951, coerced by the deportations of 1949 and the fear that surrounded them. (See *Linda Põldes’* and *Peep Vunder’s* stories)

Courland, Battle of—The battles on the Courland peninsula took place from October 1944 to May 1945. When the Red Army reached the Baltic Sea between Klaipeda (Memel) and Liepaja, over half a million German soldiers were cut off and confined on the peninsula of Courland, the so-called „Courland sack.” In the second half of March 1945, the Estonian Rifle Corps, supplemented by mobilized troops from Estonia, was brought into battle by the Red Army command to face the 218th and 329th infantry divisions of the German army and the Latvian 19th *Waffen-SS* division. The Rifle Corps was withdrawn at the beginning of April 1945. The German front held until the capitulation of Germany on 8 May 1945. Estonian soldiers were on both sides in the Courland battles, either in the German ranks, as members of the Red Army’s Estonian Rifle Corps, or as deserters from the German army who came out of hiding and were mobilized into the Red Army and sent as reinforcements.

Cultural Autonomy Law for Ethnic Minorities—The principle of cultural autonomy was first recognized by Austrian Marxists. The Estonian Republic recognized the principle in the manifesto declaring independence on 24 February 1918, and incorporated it into the first Constitution. The right to self-administered cultural government was granted to Swedes, Germans, Jews, and Russians, that is to all ethnic groups with a population not less than 3,000. The Cultural Autonomy Law was passed on 12 February 1925. On 6 June 1926 a 27-member council declared cultural autonomy for the Jewish minority in Estonia, and elected a 7-member cultural government, which concerned itself mainly with the language of instruction in the schools of ethnic minorities. The schools were given freedom of choice as to the language of instruction. (See *David Abramson’s* story).

Defense League (*Kaitseliit*)—Voluntary citizen militia in the Estonian republic between the two world wars. Founded on 11 November 1918. At the time of the June 1940 Soviet takeover, it had 42,000 adult male members. It was disarmed and disbanded at that time. Reestablished 17 February 1990.

Deportations—On 13–14 June 1941 during the first Soviet occupation, approximately 10,000 Estonians, 1% of the total population, were deported to Siberia in cattle cars. Men were separated from their families (see *Peep Vunder's* story) and sent to the Gulag, while women, children, and elderly family members were resettled in Siberian villages in the Kirov and Novosibirsk oblasts. Women were sent to work in lumber camps, *kolkhozes* and *sovhozes*. A large proportion of the deportees perished. Similar deportations were carried out in Latvia and Lithuania. The second mass deportations took place on **25–27 March 1949**, when approximately 20,000–21,000 people were “resettled” in Siberia. This second wave of deportations, ideologically justified as ridding the country of the class of “kulaks” was thus intended to enforce collectivization, and affected the rural population more severely. Though about 3,000 perished, the conditions into which the deportees were sent were somewhat more livable than during the 1941 deportation. In 1956, following Stalin's death, surviving deportees began to be allowed to return to the homeland.

Destruction battalions—Bands of non-military armed men formed by the Soviet regime in July 1941 to implement a “scorched earth” policy, as the Germans were advancing and the Soviet Army was retreating from Estonia. Numerous bloody skirmishes took place between destruction battalions and pro-independence partisans, and the destruction battalions burned many villages and committed many acts of terror.

Erna Battalion—Volunteer unit formed on 10 July 1941 of 65 Estonian men, most of whom who had fought in Finland as a reconnaissance unit. In late July 1941, it was sent behind Red Army lines, to carry out defensive battles alongside Forest Brethren against the destruction battalions, and to save civilians who had taken refuge in the woods from the front. (See *Heljo Liitoja's* story.)

Estification of names—A nationalist campaign during the 1930s, which encouraged changing proper names of foreign derivation into “proper Estonian names.” In 1934 legal procedures were established for this process. (Riigi Teataja 1934, 91, 735).

Estonian Legion—An Estonian Waffen-SS unit formed by the Nazi regime in August 1942, at first on a voluntary basis. By 13 October 1942, only 500 volunteers had signed up. (See *Evald Mätas' life story*). The general sentiment among Estonian young men was that since the Germans did not support Estonian independence, there was little point to become cannon fodder for a foreign power. Waffen-SS units were also expected to accept Nazi ideology. Some young men took the pragmatic attitude that volunteering was

better than overt mobilization, since one might have more choices about where one was eventually sent (**Valter Lehtla**, b. 1924, who responded to the mobilization and was assigned to the Third Estonian Volunteer Brigade). Others, particularly the passionately patriotic and those who had the connections and financial means for the passage (**Hans Karro**, **Hans Lebert**) and wanted to avoid serving in the German army, joined the Finnish Boys (see below). After the poor response to the call for volunteers for the Legion, additional men were drafted from the police in spring 1943, and the unit, given the name Narwa Battalion, was sent to the southern Russian front. An overt mobilization in March 1943 of all men born between 1919 and 1924 still only yielded 5,300 men for the Estonian Legion and 6,800 for the support service (*Hilfswillige*) to the German Wehrmacht (See **Linda Põldes**' story, whose husband, Elmar Põldes, participated in the *Hilfswillige*; **Voodel Võrk** b. 1925, mobilized in November 1943).

Estonian Rifle Corps (8. Eesti Laskurkorpus)—Over 33,000 Estonians were mobilized by the Red Army as they were retreating from Estonia in summer, 1941. No more than half were actually used for military service; the rest perished in the labor camps (*tööpataljonid*) where they were initially sent and kept in inhumane conditions. In January 1942, Estonian national military units within the Red Army began to be formed, composed of: those who were voluntarily evacuated in 1941, surviving members of destruction battalions, as well as those mobilized from Estonia. For those who had managed to survive the inhumane conditions of the labor camps with a modicum of health, volunteering for front-line duty in the national military unit seemed like the only escape. After September 1942, the national military unit bore the name Eighth Estonian Rifle Corps, and was sent to the front at Velikije Luki in December 1942, where it suffered heavy losses, and 1,000 men defected to the German side. Later in the war, the Corps participated in the Soviet conquest of Estonia (see **Elmar-Raimund Ruben**'s and **Juta Pihlamägi**'s life stories).

Evacuation—Between the beginning of the war between Germany and the USSR (end of June 1941) and August 1941—when the German Army had taken Tallinn—the Soviet leadership and those connected with the regime were evacuated to the interior of the USSR (see **David Abramson**'s life story).

Extradition of Baltic soldiers—by Sweden. In response to Soviet demands, in January 1946 the Swedish government extradited 7 Estonian and 139 Latvian men who had either fought in the German army, or who had fled from Courland to Sweden. (See *Battle of Courland*). One result of this action was an increased level of fear among many of those Estonians who had fled to Sweden in September 1944 that Sweden would repatriate all Baltic refugees to the Soviet Union. Many Estonians in Sweden now sought opportunities to emigrate to countries outside Europe, ranging from North America to South Africa, even undertaking desperate collective actions, buying boats to cross the Atlantic.

Finnish Boys—Young Estonian men of conscription age in October 1943, who did not want to serve in the German army, avoided the draft by crossing the Gulf of Finland to fight in the Finnish Army against the Soviets. Many of them saw this as an opportunity to gain military training in the friendly army of a “brother people,” and to be ready to use this experience in the service of fighting to restore Estonian independence. Around 5,000 young men made the passage to Finland, half of whom volunteered for service in the Finnish armed forces, 2,300 in the army, 400 in the navy. In August 1944, after Finland had signed a peace treaty with the Soviet Union, the Finnish Boys were sent back to Estonia. Many chose not to return. As narrated in *Hans Lebert*’s and *Hans Karro*’s life stories, one unit of the Finnish Boys was immediately sent to the Tartu front; the other unit fought against the Red Army in the Blue Hills (*Sinimäed*) (see below).

Forest Brothers—In popular parlance (and as it is encountered in many of the life stories in this volume) a general term used both for spontaneous resistance groups of Estonian men who attempted to evade mobilization into the Soviet army in summer 1941, as well as the guerrilla resistance movement in the postwar period, which included German army veterans and members of the Home Guard attempting to avoid arrest by Soviet security forces. In 1944–45, the guerrilla movements became more organized and active in many rural areas, with a support base dependent on people in local farms and communities. This later movement attacked security personnel, killed local executive committee members, disrupted communication lines, and otherwise tried to disrupt Soviet administrative activities. The high point of guerrilla activity—which was regionally strongest in Virumaa, Võrumaa, and Pärnumaa, because of the swampy, forested terrain—was 1946–48. By the time of the 1949 deportations, the strength of the Forest Brothers was diminishing, and raids by State Security forces, as well as a post-Stalin amnesty in 1955, gradually put an end to the movement. In this volume, *Hillar Tassa*’s and *Valdur Raudvassar*’s stories are examples of Forest Brothers, and the Brothers are frequently mentioned in several of the life stories.

Free peasants (*vabatalupojad*)—Referred to by some life story writers when writing about their forebears. During the period of German conquest of Estonia in the Middle Ages and subsequent indenturing, most peasants (the *adramaa* or plowland peasants) became subject to seigneurial taxation. Free peasants were those with sufficient means to buy exemption from taxation, and thus on a higher rung of the social ladder; this category also included rural artisans and peasants who had official functions on seigneurial estates. By the 16th century, the free peasants and the small vassals of Estonian descent, tended to be classified together.

Hirvepark (Deer Park)—Park in Tallinn where approximately 2,000 people gathered on 23 August 1987 for a political demonstration demanding that the secret protocols of the Molotov–Ribbentrop act be made public. First non-sanctioned mass political demonstration at the end of the Soviet era.

Hjalmar Mäe's Directive—As the German military situation worsened in January 1944, a new call-up of Estonian men into the German army was issued on 1 February by Hjalmar Mäe, head of the Estonian administration under the Nazi occupation. This call included all men born between 1904 and 1923, and was supported by a radio speech by Jüri Uluots, last prime minister of the Estonian republic before the June 1940 Soviet takeover (see footnote to *Hilja Lill*'s life story). This mobilization was much more successful (38,000 men), and should be understood as a choice of “the lesser of two evils,” or postponing the Soviet occupation of Estonia in hopes that the Nazi capitulation to the Allies would hold open the possibility of Estonian independence.

Home Guard (*Omakaitse*)—Local militias under the jurisdiction of local government in 1917 when, as a result of the February Revolution, the police ceased operation. Membership in 1917 was 10,000. In February 1918, the Home Guard played an active role in the takeover of power from the Estonian Military Revolutionary Committee. During the German occupation that followed, the Home Guard formed an underground Defense League (see *Defense League*), which was formally established on 11 November 1918. During World War II, specifically during June 1941, the Home Guard was mostly made up of “Forest Brethren” (partisans), most of whom were hiding to evade mobilization into the Soviet army. After the departure of Soviet forces, the Home Guard seized power in many localities, executing local communists, and some gypsies and Jews. In keeping with Nazi ideology, non-Germans were considered undesirable to send to the front; however, in early fall 1941, the German leadership called on Estonians to serve in the Home Guard as a rear guard for the Germans, and to clean out any Red Army remnants that remained on Estonian soil.

Ice Battle—Legendary battle fought on 5 April 1242 between the Teutonic Knights and Russian forces of the Republic of Novgorod on Lake Peipus, on Estonia's eastern border. The Knights were defeated at Pskov by Alexander Nevsky, who thereby set a limit to the eastern crusade. An example of the later mythologization of historical events, the battle was made famous by Sergei Eisenstein's film “Alexander Nevsky,” while during World War II, Nevsky was held up as symbol of the Russian opposition to German occupation.

Ingria and Ingrians—Ingria is a historical region of Russia between the southern bank of the Neva river, the Narva River and Lake Peipus in the west, Lake Ladoga, and the western bank of the Volkhov River in the east, populated by Finnic peoples (such as Izhorians and Votes), and by Ingrian Finns and after the 1860s, by Estonians. In the course of forced Soviet collectivization of the region, there was a deportation of 7,000 people in 1935, and deportation of whole parishes (up to 20,000 people) in 1936. During the war, 63,000 fled to Finland, but were forced to repatriate after the war. Many fled to Estonia during the war and in the immediate postwar peri-

od—thus the frequent mention of Ingrians in the life stories in this volume. (*Hans Karro's* life story)

June 1940—Following the issuance of an ultimatum to the Estonian government on 16 June, 80,000 Red Army soldiers crossed the border to Estonia. Takeover of the government followed on 21 June, organized by the Red Army. A puppet government was put into place, headed by Johannes Vares (Barbarus)

Kalevipoeg—Estonian national epic, compiled by F. R. Faehlmann, and continued after his death by F. R. Kreutzwald, in response to the famous call by G. Von Schultz-Bertram in a speech to the Learned Estonian Society in 1839: “Give the people an epic and a history, and everything else is won!” Kreutzwald used the traditional *regivärss* form of Estonian folk poetry and folkloric themes and materials to narrate the mythological adventures of the son of Kalev. *Kalevipoeg*, with its closing myth that the tragic hero, with his defiant fist locked in the gates of hell, would return to bring good fortune and happiness to his people, has more symbolic and ideological resonance for Estonians than may be claimed for the literary work itself (see *Tuuli Jaik's* and *Raimo Loo's* life stories).

Nikolai Karotamm (1901–1969)—Leading figure in the Estonian Communist Party. After joining the Party in 1928, Karotamm studied in Soviet Russia, returning to Estonia in 1940 as editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Kommunist*. Appointed First Secretary of the Estonian Communist Party in 1944. Discharged from his duties in 1950, in the course of Stalinist reforms; later worked in the Economic Institute in Moscow.

Klooga—settlement near Tallinn in Keila county. In 1943 a Nazi concentration camp was founded there. According to Soviet sources, 2,000 Jews brought there from Europe were put to death before the retreat of the Nazi forces in autumn 1944.

Lydia Koidula (nee Jannsen 1843–1886)—Lyric poet of the era of Estonian national awakening, and daughter of J. W. Jannsen, publisher of the *Perno Postimees*. Her pen name Koidula means “of the dawn,” and due to her work as her father’s assistant in publishing *Perno Postimees*, she was closely connected to several nationalist activists and public figures, carrying on a long correspondence with F. R. Kreutzwald, the author of *Kalevipoeg*. She is best known for her patriotic lyrics, many of which have been set to music. On Koidula’s biography and her significance as an iconic figure of Estonian nationalism, see also Madli Puhvel, *Symbol of Dawn* (University of Tartu Press, 1995).

Kolkhoz and sovhoz Collective farms instituted by the Soviet regime; according to Soviet models, a *kolkhoz* was a rural cooperative, while the much larger state farm, the *sovhoz*, was run on the model of an urban factory. The *kolkhoz* was seen as a transitional form to a *sovhoz*-dominated collectivized agriculture. *Collectivization of Estonian agriculture* after World

War II was slow, and there was considerable opposition among the rural population, particularly the families of those who owned private farms. The first *kolkhoz* was formed in 1947, and a more extensive land reform was carried out in the first three years of the Soviet regime, expropriating land and eliminating all farms over 30 hectares. Since collectivization was seen to be proceeding too slowly, heavy taxation was imposed, followed by the organized deportation of about 8–12% of the rural Estonian population in March 1949. By early 1950, Soviet authorities instigated the consolidation of small *kolkhozes* in the interests of greater productivity. (See life stories of **Valter Lehtla** and **Asta Luksepp**). Kolkhozniks and state farm workers were allowed private garden plots up to 0.5 hectare.

KOMSORG—Komsomol group leader, often a more active or ambitious student, whose responsibility it was to lead and oversee the activities of the Komsomol chapter, to recruit members, and to ensure both practical and political order (see **Leida Madison**'s life story)

KOMSOMOL—acronym for Organization of Communist Youth. Members for this politically motivated youth organization for those aged 14–28 were recruited in schools. The Komsomol was the active helper and reserve of the Communist Party. Membership was often a prerequisite, if not a strongly supportive credential for university enrollment and leadership positions in workplace collectives. In 1981 Estonian membership of the Komsomol was 162,260. The organization for communist children (aged 10–15) was called the Young Pioneers, preceded by the October Children, who were recruited in the 1st grade. Senior Young Pioneer leaders were teachers (see also the life stories of **Peep Vunder**, **Leida Madison**, **Ene Ergma**).

Korsun-Cherkassy Pocket—Battle on the Russian southern front on 24 January–16 February 1944, resulting from the Korsun Shevchenkovsky Offensive, during which the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian fronts trapped German forces of Army Group South in a pocket near the Dnieper River. Estonian soldiers in the 1st battalion of the Estonian SS Legion (the “Narwa” battalion of the SS regiment “Wiking”) participated in these battles in the Ukraine, suffering heavy losses.

Kulak—Wealthy farmer. In Estonia, during the process of collectivization of agriculture in Russia, designation as a kulak meant one's land, farm animals, and farm equipment were subject to expropriation. Heavy taxes were levied on kulaks: in the latter part of 1947 these were at 40% of farm income, but were raised the following year to 75%. As of January 1948 kulaks, along with those termed Nazi collaborators, and families of guerrillas were barred from joining kolkhozes, and, as political enemies, were subject to deportation in 1949. Examples of the consequences of being labeled kulaks—which did not necessarily or automatically mean deportation—can be seen in the stories of **Linda Põldes** and **Peep Vunder**.

Land Reform (Land Law)—On 10 October 1919 the Estonian Constituent Assembly passed the Land Law, abolishing hereditary estates owned

by Baltic-German landowners. The expropriated land was intended as a reserve from which land was redistributed to the landless, with first priority given to those who had fought in the Estonian War of Independence. The Estonian land reform was the first of its kind in eastern Europe, and the most radical, involving 2,000,000 hectares of land. In 1926 partial but small compensation was offered by the government to those whose land had been expropriated.

Johan Laidoner (1884–1953)—Military and state leader; took part in World War I as head of headquarters, was division commander in the Estonian War of Independence; afterwards, Commander-in-Chief of the Estonian Armed Forces during the Estonian Republic. Arrested in 1941 and died in prison.

Juhan Liiv (1864–1913)—Estonian poet from a poor background, who suffered from recurrent bouts of psychiatric illness. Liiv's lyrics—many of which have been set to music—have strong overtones of patriotism and love for the homeland, and have become icons of national sentiment, and are thus frequently quoted in life stories.

Lennart Meri (1929–2006)—Estonian writer and politician. From 1958 on, published travel books (the most famous of which is *Hõbevalge*) and made ethnographic films based on his journeys to research Finno-Ugric minorities living in the Volga basin and other places in Russia. ("The Water Bird People" and "The Voices of Kaleva"). When Estonia became independent again in 1990, Lennart Meri was appointed foreign minister, and served as Ambassador to Finland (April–October 1992). In October 1992 he was elected head of state of the Estonian Republic, and was reelected for a second term as President in September 1996.

Nekrutid (recruits)—Estonian men were subject to conscription in the Russian army from 1797–1874. During the first half of the 19th century (in Livland beginning in 1829), recruits were chosen by lots among those of conscriptable age (20–30 years of age). Farmowners, county officials, and schoolmasters were exempt from conscription. During the period 1798–1874, over 100,000 Estonian men were recruited, and few survived to return home after the 25-year term of service.

New landowners (*Uusmaasaajad*)—During the first Soviet occupation of Estonia, from October to December 1940, all private holdings over 30 hectares were expropriated without compensation (along with land belonging to churches and religious groups, and land held by cities and local communities). Half of the expropriated land was redistributed to landless peasants and small landholders. The size of these new farms was about 11 hectares. Considerable bad blood was created in localities; a new regime presented opportunities to settle old accounts with neighbors. (See life stories of *Hans Karro*, *Linda Põldes*.)

Otto Tief's government—A desperate bid to declare Estonian independence between the German occupation (which ended with General Commissar Litzmann's announcement to Hjalmar Mäe on 17 September 1944 that the Germans were withdrawing from Estonia), and the Soviet takeover of Tallinn on 22 September 1944. Otto Tief (1889–1976), who held a seat in the Estonian Republic's Parliament and served twice as minister in 1927–1928, was Minister of the Interior and deputy Prime Minister in this government, which was elected by the Estonian National Committee, an underground movement with members from all the political parties of independent Estonia, and officially sworn in on 18 September by Jüri Uluots, Prime Minister (with the duties of President since the arrest of President Konstantin Päts). After the Soviet takeover, members of the Tief government sought to flee the country for Sweden on 29 September, Tief and Karl Liidak (Minister of Agriculture, see *Hilja Lill's* life story) were unsuccessful; Tief was arrested and sentenced to prison camp, where he spent ten years, returning to Estonia in 1955; Liidak hid himself in the countryside and died in 1945. The importance of the Tief government, in symbolic and ideological terms, is as the basis for the argument of the juridical continuity of the free Estonian republic, being the last legal government of the Estonia republic until independence was declared anew in 1991.

Patarei prison—Prison located in the old naval fortress in Tallinn since 1920. After the annexation of Estonia to the Soviet Union in 1940, the prison was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Soviet secret police, the NKVD, and was notorious for its inhumane conditions. Thus it is noteworthy that in the life stories of some contributors to this volume, the Patarei is compared favorably to the previous period of interrogations in the cellars on Pagari Street. The Patarei prison was closed permanently in December 2002.

Johan Pitka (1872–1944?)—Commander of Estonian naval forces in the Estonian War of Independence; one of the main organizers of the armed forces of the Estonian republic. In Finland from 1940, Pitka returned to Estonia in 1944 to organize armed bands to resist the Soviet invasion and prevent the occupation of Estonia. Missing as of autumn 1944.

Politruk—political officer in Soviet military units, with the responsibility of political instruction and oversight, including informing on any behavior suspect of being “nationalist” or otherwise subversive.

Potemkinism—Potemkin villages were supposedly fake villages set up by Russian minister Grigori Aleksandrovitch Potemkin along the Dnieper to fool the Empress Catherine II during her visit to the Crimea in 1787, magnifying the extent of her conquests. As a metaphor, the term “Potemkin villages” has come to mean other such attempts to hide unpleasant, damaging, or horrendous circumstances from visitors by means of similar fictions. The term was widely in the Soviet era, often with reason (see life stories of *Valter Lehtla*, *Peep Vunder*).

Konstantin Päts (1874–1956)—First President of the Estonian Republic 1938–1940. Graduated in 1898 in law from Tartu University, and worked as a journalist. In 1917 took part in the formation of national military units. Member and convener of the Constituent Assembly and the first five Parliaments, acting head of state during the period of the 1934 constitutional crisis, during which he and Johan Laidoner prevented the national-socialist-leaning War of Independence veterans from seizing power. In 1938 became president of the republic. Arrested in 1940 and deported with his family by the Soviet occupation authorities. Died in prison.

Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD)—Established in July 1934 as a union of several work organizations from the 1920s. Members of the RAD worked on a variety of construction projects, both military and civilian, and did agricultural work. Divided into men's and women's sections, members were classified as *Wehrmachtsgefolge* (helpers of the military forces). During the German occupation of Estonia, service in the RAD was a prerequisite for university admission. At the close of the year of service, great pressure was exerted on young men to enlist in the German military.

Russian Estonians or Estonians from Russia—After World War II, Estonians living in Russia were recruited for a variety of positions in local and state government and sent or repatriated to Estonia. Unlike ethnic Estonians in the homeland, they were considered to be more politically trustworthy. Many of them had never been to Estonia before, and since they often had a poor Estonian language skills or a conspicuous accent, they were regarded with distrust or scorn. Many Russian Estonians were the descendants of those who emigrated in the 1860s in search of land and had founded Estonian villages in the Crimea, Siberia, and Samara, and had preserved the Estonian language and traditions in their homes. In this volume, *Leida Madison's* is a "Russian Estonian" life story. *Volita Paklar's* life story also gives a historical perspective on the lives of Russian Estonians.

Russian Revolution—The "local" impact of the Russian Revolution in Estonia, mentioned in several life stories in this volume (*Hilja Lill*, *Tuuli Jaik*, *Elmar-Raimund Ruben*), is regarded in history books as setting the stage and creating a "window of opportunity" for Estonian national independence; equally important as context is the turning fortunes of World War I. About 100,000 Estonian men (almost 10% of the ethnic Estonian population) were mobilized into the Tsar's armed forces. The Estonian countryside suffered, not only because of the loss of men, but also livestock and machinery. Wartime industry and inflation also had serious adverse effects (See *Hilja Lill*, *Tuuli Jaik's* life stories) The number of Estonians estimated to be living in Russia is 200,000, almost 40,000 of them in Petrograd (formerly St. Petersburg). After news of the Tsar's overthrow reached Tallinn on 1 March 1917, the Provisional (Kerensky) Government united the territory of Estonia into a single province (*kubermang*), under the jurisdiction of a commissar, Tallinn mayor Jaan Poska (grandfather of

Tanni Kents), advised by a Provincial Council (*Maanõukogu*), elected at the end of May, and meeting for the first time on 1 July. Having founded their own representative organization, the Tallinn Soviet, in early March, from among industrial workers and soldiers, Estonian Bolsheviks organized widespread demonstrations among soldiers and workers in hopes of a Bolshevik seizure of power. At the end of May Estonian Mensheviks formed their own political party, the Estonian Social-Democratic Union (led by Mihkel Martna and August Rei), renamed in June as the Estonian Social-Democratic Workers' Party. In April permission is granted by the Provisional Government for the formation of "national" military units. At the end of September 1917, German forces land in Saaremaa, and within a few days they conquer the Estonian islands. A large number of soldiers from the 1st Estonian division are taken prisoner in Muhu. (*Linda Põldes'* story) After the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in Petrograd on 26 October (the October Revolution), Viktor Kingissepp and the Estonian Military-Revolutionary Committee takes over power from Poska. Beginning of the Bolshevik terror (see *Elmar-Raimund Ruben's* story), during which the Provincial Council is forbidden from operating publicly.

Setud—name for an Estonian ethnic group settled in southeast Estonia on the southwestern and southern shores of Lake Peipus. Today the traditional settlement area of the Setu is divided in two by the Russian border. As distinct from the majority of Estonians, the Setu practice the Russian Orthodox faith, have their own Estonian language (or separate dialect), and maintain their own distinctive identity.

Sinimäed (Blue Hills)—A plateau in Virumaa (northeast Estonia) where the Germans drew their defense lines in World War II. A bloody battle raged there from 25 July 1944 to 10 August 1944, during which the Germans, along with soldiers of many ethnic groups, including Estonians, held back an attack by the Red Army, which greatly outnumbered them. The positions were held until the middle of September 1944, giving many Estonians time to make a choice between fleeing the homeland or staying.

Singing Revolution—Name given to mass events of the closing years of the 1980s, preceding the regaining of Estonian independence. In summer 1988, various spontaneous "night song festivals" (*öölaulupeod*) took place in Tallinn, and were followed in September 1988 by the event "Song of Estonia," a night of singing and speeches organized by the Popular Front at the Song Festival Grounds in Tallinn, and attended by 300,000 people. Evoking the tradition of song festivals during the era of national awakening in the second half of the 19th century, the national movement leading to independence in 1991 later came to be referred to as the "singing revolution."

Song Festivals—The first Estonian song festival was held in Tartu in 1869, a mass event organized by J.W. Jannsen and the Vanemuise society, that gave momentum to other activities in the movement of national awakening. The

model for the event was the Baltic-German song festivals, and 845 musicians participated, with 10,000–15,000 in the audience. Six all-Estonian song festivals were held in the 19th century (1869, 1879, 1880, 1891, 1894, 1896), and the tradition continued in the 20th century, including the Soviet era and period of perestroika. Indeed, the Estonian struggle for independence at the end of the 1980's has been called the “singing revolution,” referring to the spontaneous, mass gatherings at the Song Festival Amphitheatre in the summer of 1988 to “sing ourselves free.”

Soviet Administrative Districts, *oblast*, *raion*, and *krai*—These terms, where used in the life stories, refer to the Soviet regime, and its replacement of the traditional administrative-territorial structure of Estonia, which itself has a long, multilayered history. During the Tsarist era, (since 1721 Estonia was part of Imperial Russia), *oblasts* were administrative units of the Governorates General or *krais*. The majority of *oblasts* were located on the periphery of the empire, or in Cossack areas. In the Soviet era, *oblasts* were one of the administrative units in the union republics, and were subdivided into *raions* and cities directly under the jurisdiction of the *oblast*. Because of the variety of terms used to translate these divisions, in this collection the terms *oblast*, *raion*, and *krai* have been retained in italicized transliterated form, as foreign words.

Soviet Secret Police (Ministry for State Security and Internal Affairs)—In this volume two secret police organizations are mentioned by life story authors: the NKVD and the KGB. During World War II and the immediate postwar period, the feared secret police was the NKVD—*Narodny Kommissariat Vnutrennykh Del* (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs), predecessor of the KGB—formed at the end of August 1940 and headed by Boris Kumm (See *Hilja Lill's* life story). The NKGB was separated from the NKVD of the USSR in 1943, and the corresponding organizations were set up in Estonia in February 1944. In March 1946, the NKVD in the Estonian SSR was renamed Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD in Russian), and the NKGB was renamed as the Ministry of State Security (MGB in Russian). Further reforms took place in 1953–54. In general terms, as concerns the purging of politically undesirable elements, life story authors after the war had dealings with the NKVD's successor, the KGB—*Komitet Gosudarstvennoye Bezopasnosti* (Committee of People's Security). See *Valdur Raudvassar* and *Hillar Tassa's* life stories. The civilian police under the Soviet regime was referred to as the *milits*. This word has been retained in the texts of the life stories.

Stalingrad—World War II battle between Nazi Germany and its allies and the Soviet Union between 17 July 1942–2 February 1943, over control of Stalingrad, a city in southern Russia. Casualties totaled nearly two million. The battle, which trapped and destroyed the German 6th Army, was the first major German defeat of World War II.

Battle of Tehumardi—The night battle of Tehumardi on 8 October 1944 was one of the bloodiest battles of World War II in Saaremaa (Ösel), the largest of the islands off the west coast of Estonia. Temporary chaos among Soviet forces halted the rapid Soviet advance on Saaremaa for more than 24 hours, allowing the Germans to secure defenses on the Sõrve peninsula. In official Soviet accounts, Tehumardi is taken as a Soviet victory. In actuality, it was a fratricidal drama for Estonians, who had been mobilized by both sides.

Umsiedlung—German term for the resettlement of people of German extraction between 1939–1941, in accordance with the terms of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact concluded on 23 August 1939 between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union.

Vanemuine society—Founded in Tartu 1865, the most important of the clubs and local societies founded during the Estonian national awakening movement; a crucial factor in developing musical culture and organizing song festivals.

Johannes Vares (pen name Barbarus, 1890–1946)—Physician, poet, and politician; prime minister of the Estonian SSR during the first Soviet occupation, 1940–41.

Volga Germans—Ethnic Germans living around the Volga River in southern European Russia and the Saratov area. Many migrated from Germany during Catherine the Great's reign, seeking better living conditions and better land. Because of Stalin's fear that the Volga Germans might collaborate with Germany during World War II, the Volga Germans (like the Kalmyks, Crimean Tatars, and North Caucasian Muslims) were subjected to deportation—eastwards to Kazakhstan and Siberia. In 1942 almost all able-bodied men were conscripted, most of whom did not survive the labor camps. Estonians deported either in 1941 or 1949 to Siberia were likely to encounter a variety of previously deported ethnic minorities in the Siberian villages where they landed, including the Volga Germans.

Voluntary Associations—associations for common interest (agricultural societies, handworkers' societies), social support (e.g. volunteer firefighters) and mutual enjoyment (singing societies) founded by the Baltic Germans beginning in the 18th century, and by Estonians in the second half of the 19th century. These societies existed independently of social status or class, and were a crucial motivating force in shaping the emergence of civil society.

War of Independence—28 November 1918–3 January 1920. War fought by Estonians against Soviet Russia. On 11 November 1918, after the capitulation of Germany in World War I, Soviet troops attacked Narva, and were repulsed by retreating German forces. The Estonian army was still in the process of formation. At the same time as the fight was being carried out to defend the Estonian Republic, the Reds had the intention of creating an Estonian Working People's Commune, and exercised considerable terror

(see *Elmar-Raimund Ruben*'s story). 3,500 Finnish volunteers came to the aid of the Estonians, and by the end of 1918 the attacks were driven back. Breakthrough battles took place at the beginning of 1918. Though at first the only ones to answer the call to arms were schoolboys, by February 1919 the Estonian army consisted of 19,400 men, who fought to the finish. A truce was declared on 3 January 1920, and a peace treaty was concluded on 2 February 1920 (referred to as the Tartu peace).

Women's Auxiliary (*Naiskodukaitse*)—women's auxiliary of the *Kaitseliit* (Defense League) founded in 1927 and dissolved in June 1940 with the first Soviet occupation. *Naiskodukaitse* supported the activities of *Kaitseliit*, raising funds through raffles, collections, and dances, as well as engaging in the patriotic education of its members, which numbered 15,000 by the end of the Estonian republic. Reestablished in 1991.

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After a short period of independence, Estonia was occupied in World War II by the Red Army, then Nazi Germany, and again, for a lasting occupation, by the Soviets. No wonder that a greater part of the roughly one million Estonians had harshly eventful lives.

This anthology contains 25 selected life stories collected from Estonians who lived through the tribulations of the 20th century, and describe the travails of ordinary people under numerous regimes. The autobiographical accounts provide authentic perspectives on events of this period, where time is placed in the context of life-spans, and subjects grounded in personal experience. Most of the life stories reveal sufferings under foreign (Russian) oppression.

The life stories in this volume were selected from among those submitted to a 1999 Estonian Literary Museum life story writing competition "One Hundred Lives of the Century." The goal was a composite "Estonian life story," a mosaic portrait composed of one hundred life stories spanning several generations in the 20th century. Neither "simple autobiography," nor "real history," life stories are complex sources for making meaning of the past. Rich in humour and salty joy as well as tragedy, these are the stories of survivors and their kin, letters addressed to a contemporary public hungry to know more about the untold and the silenced past, as well as to readers at home and beyond, those who hold the future.

Central European University Press

Budapest – New York

Sales and information: ceupress@ceu.hu

Website: <http://www.ceupress.com>

ISBN 978 963 9776 39 5

